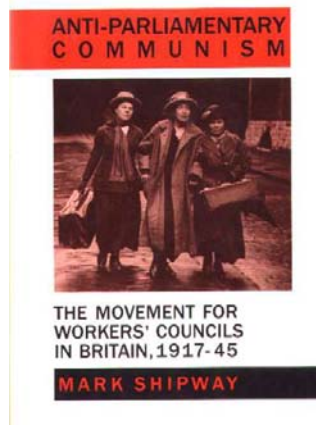


MARK SHIPWAY



ANTI-PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNISM THE MOVEMENT FOR WORKERS COUNCILS IN BRITAIN '17-'45 (!!!only partly!!!)



PRINCIPLES, PROPOSITIONS & DISCUSSIONS FOR LAND & FREEDOM

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO THE 'ANARCHIVE'

"Anarchy is Order!"

*'I must Create a System or be enslav'd by
another Man's.
I will not Reason & Compare: my business
is to Create'
(William Blake)*

During the 19th century, anarchism has developed as a result of a social current which aims for freedom and happiness. A number of factors since World War I have made this movement, and its ideas, disappear little by little under the dust of history.

After the classical anarchism – of which the Spanish Revolution was one of the last representatives—a 'new' kind of resistance was founded in the sixties which claimed to be based (at least partly) on this anarchism. However this resistance is often limited to a few (and even then partly misunderstood) slogans such as 'Anarchy is order', 'Property is theft',...

Information about anarchism is often hard to come by, monopolised and intellectual; and therefore visibly disappearing. The 'anarchive' or 'anarchist archive' Anarchy is Order (in short **A.O**) is an attempt to make the '**principles, propositions and discussions**' of this tradition available again for anyone it concerns. We believe that these texts are part of our own heritage. They don't belong to publishers, institutes or specialists.

These texts thus have to be available for all anarchists and other people interested. That is one of the conditions to give anarchism a new impulse, to let the 'new anarchism' outgrow the slogans. This is what makes this project relevant for us: we must find our roots to be able to renew ourselves. We have to learn from the mistakes of our socialist past. History has shown that a large number of the anarchist ideas remain

standing, even during the most recent social-economic developments.

‘Anarchy Is Order’ does not make profits, everything is spread at the price of printing- and papercosts. This of course creates some limitations for these archives.

Everyone is invited to spread along the information we give . This can be done by copying our leaflets, printing texts from the CD (collecting all available texts at a given moment) that is available or copying it, e-mailing the texts to friends and new ones to us,... Become your own anarchivists!!!

(Be aware though of copyright restrictions. We also want to make sure that the anarchist or non-commercial printers, publishers and authors are not being harmed. Our priority on the other hand remains to spread the ideas, not the ownership of them.)

The anarchivists offers these texts hoping that values like **freedom, solidarity and direct action** get a new meaning and will be lived again; so that the struggle continues against the

*“...demons of flesh and blood, that sway scepters down here;
and the dirty microbes that send us dark diseases and wish to
squash us like horseflies;
and the will-‘o-the-wisp of the saddest ignorance.”*

(L-P. Boon)

The rest depends as much on you as it depends on us. Don’t mourn, Organise!

Comments, questions, criticism, cooperation can be sent to A.O@advalvas.be.

A complete list and updates are available on this address, new texts are always

WELCOME!!

ANTI-PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNISM
-THE MOVEMENT FOR WORKERS'
COUNCILS IN BRITAIN, 1917 - 45 –

MARK SHIPWAY

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Part 3 Capitalist war and Class War 1936-45

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- 2. The Second World War**
- 3. A Balance Sheet**

INTRODUCTION

This book developed out of an interest in a political movement known as 'left' or 'council' communism, which achieved brief prominence -- particularly in Germany -- at the end of the First World War.

Before the war the future left communists generally belonged to the left wing of the social democratic parties of the Second International. After these parties had lined up in support of their respective ruling classes at the outbreak of the armed conflict in 1914, the left communists were soon to be found among the revolutionary minority which called on the working class to 'turn the imperialist war into civil war'. At the same time they also began to formulate a radical critique of the social democratic ideas which had led to the Second International's integration into capitalist society and to its support for the war.

The left communists were quick to acclaim the 1917 Russian revolution and in its wake participated in the formation of communist parties as constituents of a new, Third International. The left communists confidently expected their Russian comrades' support in the struggle against the treacherous social democratic and trade union leaderships, and against outmoded forms of working-class action such as parliamentarism. These hopes were soon dashed, however, when the Third International adopted the tactics which Lenin had outlined in his notorious attack on the left communists, Left-Wing Communism – an Infantile Disorder.

Besides disagreeing with the Bolsheviks over the most appropriate tactics for use in the class struggle in Western Europe, the left communists were also critical of the direction taken by events within Russia itself, especially after the introduction of the New Economic

Policy (1921). which they regarded as a 'reversion to capitalism'. Eventually the left communists argued that Russia was a capitalist state run by the Bolsheviks and that the Third International's policies simply reflected the interests of the Russian capitalist state in the field of foreign policy. Thus the left communists were driven to form a new -- anti-Bolshevik -- Fourth International. in which the interests of the world revolution would take precedence over the interests of any of the new International's constituent national parties. Consequently the term 'left' communism soon became obsolete, since the 'orthodox' communists (that is, the Bolsheviks) were now recognised as belonging to the capitalist political spectrum. Thereafter the left communists became more widely known as 'council' communists, because of their emphasis on workers' councils (or soviets), rather than political parties, as the means which the working class would use to overthrow capitalism and administer communism.

In the chapter of 'Left-Wing' Communism, An Infantile Disorder which dealt with the revolutionary movement in Britain, Lenin's attack was mainly directed against a group called the Workers' Socialist Federation. The WSF had started out as an organisation of militant suffragists, but its political views were transformed in the direction of revolutionary communism by the impact of the Russian revolution. The WSF existed until mid-1924 and changed its name several times during this period, so for the sake of convenience it is usually referred to in this book as the Dreadnought group, after the title of its weekly publication the Workers' Dreadnought, which was edited by Sylvia Pankhurst.

It was as a history of the Dreadnought group - left communism's representatives in Britain - that this book was originally conceived. As the work of researching the

Dreadnought group's ideas and activities during 1917-24 progressed, however, it was exciting to discover that other anti-parliamentary communist organisations existed in Britain at that time and that anti-parliamentary communist ideas survived the Dreadnought's demise.

As well as in the pages of the Workers' Dreadnought anti-parliamentary communist ideas were also put forward by a newspaper called the Spur, which was edited by Guy Aldred. Whereas Sylvia Pankhurst and her comrades were chiefly influenced by post-First World War left communism. Guy Aldred and his comrades drew much of their inspiration from nineteenth-century anarchists such as Bakunin. The Spur was not the publication of any particular organisation, but had close links with several revolutionary propaganda groups throughout Britain. As far as the history of anti-parliamentary communism is concerned the most significant of these was the Glasgow Anarchist Group an organisation which could trace its lineage back through a succession of Clydeside-based groups which had propagated an anarchist-influenced version of anti-parliamentarism since the 1890s.

In 1920 the Glasgow Anarchist Group renamed itself the Glasgow Communist Group in order to express its affinity with the Russian revolution and its support for revolutionary unity in Britain. However, the Glasgow group also soon became disillusioned with the tactics foisted on the Western European revolutionary movement by the Bolsheviks, and in 1921 it took the initiative in the formation of an Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation to directly oppose the Russian-backed Communist Party of Great Britain.

The APCF sustained the anti-parliamentary communist tradition in Britain until the end of the Second World War. During this time it suffered two splits in its ranks.

The first of these took place in 1933, when Guy Aldred and some of his comrades broke away to form the United Socialist Movement. The second split took place in 1937, with the departure of some anarchists who were later involved in the formation of the Glasgow Anarchist Federation at the beginning of the Second World War. In this book the APCF is regarded as the genuine standard-bearer of anti-parliamentary communism in Britain during the 1930s and 1940s, but the ideas of the USM and the Anarchists are also examined and discussed.

As research brought more and more information to light about the history of anti-parliamentary communism in Britain, the need for an accurate, comprehensive and sympathetic study of the subject became increasingly obvious. Biographies of Sylvia Pankhurst dwell at length on her pre-1917 suffragist ideas and activities; references to her years as an anti-parliamentary communist are conspicuous only by their absence. Nor are the histories of the early years of the CPGB much more enlightening. The Dreadnought group participated in the communist unity negotiations which preceded the formation of the CPGB, but its ideas were at odds with the tactics which the CPGB eventually adopted. This enables historians of the CPGB to portray the Dreadnought group as an 'infantile' tributary flowing into the Leninist mainstream, later to emerge as an effluent which disappears into the void. None of them assess anti-parliamentary communist ideas in their own right, and even their most banal 'factual' comments about the anti-parliamentarians are frequently mistaken.

Guy Aldred and his comrades have escaped such treatment, but only because they withdrew from the unity negotiations at an early stage. Their reward for this has been that historians ignore them altogether -- a fate which has also befallen the anti-parliamentary

communists active in Britain after 1924. Only the few present-day revolutionary groups which acknowledge a political debt to the past work of the anti-parliamentary communists have shown any interest in setting the record straight. Yet all too often even these groups accounts are flawed by superficial research and a tendency to bend the facts to suit their own preconceptions.

This book is, therefore, the first serious, lengthy and detailed account of the theory of anti-parliamentary communism and of the history of the groups which adhered to this theory in Britain between the two world wars. Yet it would be misleading to give the impression that it has been written simply out of a concern to establish the historical truth. There is a political assumption underlying this book's choice of subject. That is, that the anti-parliamentary communists are worthy of our attention because the views they held place them among the relatively small number of groups and individuals which have put forward a genuine alternative to world-wide capitalism.

This alternative, which the anti-parliamentarians described interchangeably as socialism or communism, was far removed from what is popularly understood by these terms, such as the policies of the Labour Party or the system which developed in Russia after 1917. For reasons which this book will explain, the anti-parliamentary communists regarded the Labour Party as a capitalist organisation and Russia as a capitalist state. The socialism/communism advocated by the anti-parliamentarians meant the complete abolition of the system which forces the dispossessed majority into dependence on wage slavery. producing wealth for exchange in a market economy, to the profit of a privileged few who rule society in their own interests. It would involve wrenching the world's productive

resources out of the hands of their present controllers, and transforming and developing them to produce wealth directly for use, so that everyone's individually-determined needs would be provided in abundance.

Political organisations popularly identified with socialism/communism have often paid lip service to such ideas. On attaining power, however, they have always maintained in existence the very money-market-wages system they purported to oppose. At no time have the measures advocated by the anti-parliamentarians ever been put into practice in any of the so-called socialist or communist states in the world. Capitalism still exists everywhere, with all the consequences of its normal way of functioning: unemployment, war, relentless insecurity and material deprivation for the vast majority of the world's inhabitants, and so on. As long as this state of affairs continues groups such as the anti-parliamentary communists will always be important, because the socialist/communist ideas they propagated offer the working class its only solution to the wars and barbarism which the present world system holds in store. As the anti-parliamentarians frequently warned: 'All Else Is Illusion.'

The relative obscurity in which the anti-parliamentary communists expended most of their efforts has made the job of researching some parts of their history a difficult task. It can be confidently asserted, however, that enough material has been located to form the basis of a detailed and comprehensive account of what the anti-parliamentarians were doing and thinking at each stage of the period covered. What is just as certain is that this book is unlikely to be the final word on the subject. For example, not long after the original research for this book had been completed and submitted for examination as a doctoral thesis, a comrade in Norway informed me

that in an archive in Copenhagen he had come across correspondence revealing the practical solidarity given to two council communist refugees from Nazi Germany by anti-parliamentarians in Glasgow in the mid-1930s. Unfortunately, this discovery came too late for its findings to be included in this text. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that this book will inspire others to take an interest in its subject, and to make similar discoveries which will help to correct, improve or expand the account presented here. If this happens the hard work which has gone into writing this book will have been well worth the effort.

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PART I BASIC PRINCIPLES 1917-1924

1 'ANTI-PARLIAMENTARISM' AND 'COMMUNISM'

The term 'anti-parliamentary communism' begs two questions. First, what is 'anti-parliamentarism'? Secondly, what is 'communism'? This opening chapter is intended to answer these questions. It begins with a chronological account of the history of the anti-parliamentary communist groups in Britain during 1917-24, followed by an examination of the meanings attached to 'parliamentarism' and 'anti-parliamentarism' in the debates over tactics which took place within the revolutionary movement during these years. After a discussion of the deeper philosophy of anti-parliamentarism that informed its adherents' views on a wide range of issues, the chapter ends with an explanation of the anti-parliamentarians' conception of communism.

BREAKING WITH SUFFRAGISM: THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The association between the Pankhursts and Votes For Women is so firmly established in most people's minds that it may come as a surprise to find Sylvia Pankhurst occupying such a prominent place in this account of anti-parliamentarism. Most descriptions of Pankhurst's life end, or leave an unexplained gap, where this account begins with Sylvia Pankhurst still a militant suffragist, but on the brink of a major change in her ideas. Until 1917 Pankhurst's political ambitions were summed up in the aims of the Workers' Suffrage Federation, the

organisation which she had founded (as the East London Federation of Suffragettes) in 1914:

'To secure Human Suffrage, namely, a Vote, for every Woman and Man of full age, and to win Social and Economic Freedom for the People.' In July 1917 the WSF changed the name of its newspaper from the Woman's Dreadnought to Workers' Dreadnought and expanded its statement of aims slightly in order to clarify that 'Social and Economic Freedom for the People' would be established 'on the basis of a Socialist Commonwealth'.

The WSF argued that the vote would enable women workers to exert influence over the fundamental decisions affecting their lives. Universal suffrage would 'make Parliament obedient to the people's will'. [1] If it was the will of the people that a socialist society should be established, they could bring this about by electing socialists to Parliament. A prerequisite of this strategy was that the suffrage should be extended to every woman and man.

The centrality of the suffrage issue in the WSF's political outlook was reflected in its response to the February Revolution in Russia. The news that the Tsarist autocracy had been overthrown and that 'a constituent assembly is to be elected by the men and women of Russia by secret ballot and on the basis of Universal Suffrage' [2] was one of the main reasons why the WSF reacted favourably towards the February Revolution.

We can gauge how far the WSF was from anti-parliamentarism at this stage by contrasting its views with those of Guy Aldred, whose rejection of the idea that universal suffrage would produce governments which reflected and responded to ordinary people's wishes was evident in his own response to the February Revolution. In May 1917 Aldred wrote: 'We know that

the vote does not mean freedom . . . In Britain, our parliament has been a sham. Everywhere parliamentary oratory is bogus passion, universal suffrage an ineffective toy gun of the democracy at play in the field of politics. Why celebrate the triumph of the toy in the land of the ex-Czar?.' [3]

While the February Revolution evoked very different responses from Aldred on the one hand and Pankhurst on the other, the October Revolution in Russia acted as a catalyst in the WSF's ideas which would eventually lead it to adopt the position already held by Aldred and his comrades. This change began in dramatic fashion. The WSF's statement of intent, 'To Secure a Vote for every Woman and Man of full age, and to win Social and Economic Freedom for the People on the basis of a Socialist Commonwealth', no longer appeared in the Workers' Dreadnought after the issue dated 19 January 1918, and the following week's issue carried an article by Sylvia Pankhurst praising the Bolsheviks' dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in Petrograd just eight days previously.

In March 1917 the WSF had looked forward to the establishment of the Constituent Assembly with keen anticipation', in January 1918 the Bolsheviks dispersed the very same Assembly before its first meeting -- with Pankhurst's endorsement. Until 1917 the WSF had viewed events such as the February Revolution through the prism of the suffrage issue: after 1917 it would view issues such as suffrage through the prism of the October Revolution.

It was the emergence of the soviets in Russia, seen as the means by which the revolution had been carried out and as the administrative machinery of the post-revolutionary society, which caused the WSF to reject the parliamentary route to socialism. The group's

commitment to 'Popular Control of the Management of the World' [4] was not abandoned; it was simply felt that soviets (committees of recallable delegates elected by and answerable to mass meetings of working-class people) would be far better able to bring about this goal than parliaments. In her article on the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly Sylvia Pankhurst argued: 'As a representative body, an organisation such as the All-Russian Workers', Soldiers', Sailors' and Peasants' Council is more closely in touch with and more directly represents its constituents than the Constituent Assembly, or any existing Parliament.' [5] Likewise, the view of the WSF Executive Committee was that soviets were 'the most democratic form of government yet established'. [6]

The WSF's recognition of the superiority of the soviet form quickly cast doubts on the parliamentary approach to which the group had previously adhered. In February 1918 Sylvia Pankhurst asked:

Is it possible to establish Socialism with the Parliament at Westminster as its foundation? . . . We must consider very seriously whether our efforts should not be bent on the setting aside of this present Parliamentary system and the substitution for it of a local, national and international system, built upon an occupational basis, of which the members shall be but the delegates of those who are carrying on the world's work. [7]

Similar doubts about the possibility of establishing socialism by parliamentary means and tentative suggestions of soviets as an alternative were also raised by the rest of the WSF. Resolutions adopted at the WSF's Annual Conference in May 1918 showed that the organisation had not yet rejected parliamentarism completely. For example, one resolution urged workers in Britain to elect 'International Socialists' to Parliament

and not to vote for any candidate who supported the war. However, another resolution argued that 'Parliament organised on a territorial basis and government from the top are suited only to the capitalist system', and called for the organisation of 'a National Assembly of Local Workers' Committees . . . which shall render Parliament unnecessary by usurping its functions'. [8] The Conference's decision to change the organisation's name from the Workers' Suffrage Federation to the Workers' Socialist Federation also signified a growing rejection of parliamentarism, as did the removal of the slogan 'Socialism, Internationalism, Votes For All' from the masthead of the Workers' Dreadnought in July 1918, and its replacement with a simple appeal 'For International Socialism'.

By the time of the general election at the end of 1918 the WSF's views on parliamentarism were still in a state of transition. When a group of Sylvia Pankhurst's admirers in Sheffield asked her to stand as a candidate in the Hallam constituency, the Dreadnought reported that Pankhurst had declined the invitation: 'in accordance with the policy of the Workers' Socialist Federation, she regards Parliament as an out-of-date machine and joins the Federation in working to establish the soviets in Britain'. [9]

Other responses to the election were less clear-cut. When a General Meeting of the WSF was questioned about its attitude it replied that the WSF 'would not run candidates and would only support Socialists, but that it could not prevent members working for Labour candidates if they wished to'. [10] Furthermore, the following statement by Sylvia Pankhurst could be interpreted as supporting involvement in the election in order to spread revolutionary ideas:

The expected General Election interests us only so far as it can be made a sounding-board for the policy of replacing capitalism by Socialism, and Parliament by the Workers' Councils. We shall be at the elections, but only to remind the workers that capitalism must go. [11]

Thus despite the WSF's growing anti-parliamentarism, in the end it gave support to three Socialist Labour Party candidates (J.T. Murphy, Arthur MacManus and William Paul) and also to David Kirkwood and John Maclean. [12] Indeed, Pankhurst herself travelled to Glasgow in mid-November 1918 to open a Grand Sale Of Work in aid of Maclean's campaign fund.

Pankhurst's support for Maclean enables us to draw another comparison between the WSF's views at this point and the anti-parliamentary position as represented by Guy Aldred. In June 1918 Aldred had opposed Maclean's decision to stand for Parliament, citing the 'Marxian truism that the workers for their own political purpose -- which is the social revolutionary one of expropriating the ruling class -- cannot seize and use parliamentary machinery of the capitalist state'. This was Aldred's rendition of Marx's statement in *The Civil War in France*, that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes'. [13]

Aldred advised Maclean to 'make your programme analogous to the Sinn Fein programme only with Socialism and not mere nationalism for its objective'. [14] At the 1918 general election the Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein had said that its elected Members of Parliament would boycott Westminster and establish their own parliament in Dublin. In the context of communist candidatures the 'Sinn Fein' tactic meant that Successful candidates would not go to parliament, but would remain in their constituencies till they had a

quorum, then they would constitute an assembly, insisting on the right to represent the district which elected them. Thus a dual authority is established. which could possibly spread like wild-fire, as these innovations do, and eventually challenge the state. [15]

The election of a communist candidate standing on the 'Sinn Fein' programme would be an expression of the voters' opinion that 'political authority should be withdrawn from Parliament and represented in Councils or Soviets created by and responsible to the workers'. [16] These references to 'dual authority' and 'Councils or Soviets' suggest that besides the obvious influence derived from the Irish nationalists, the example of the 1917 Russian revolution also entered into the thinking behind the 'Sinn Fein' tactic advocated by Aldred.

Only by 1919 could the WSF be said to have finally arrived at a fully-fledged anti-parliamentary position. In March of that year Sylvia Pankhurst wrote: 'Circumstance are forcing the Socialists of every country to choose whether they will work to perpetuate the Parliamentary system of government or to build up an industrial republic on Soviet lines. It is impossible to work effectively for both ends. [17] It soon became clear which choice the WSF had made. A resolution 'to ignore all Parliamentary and Municipal elections and to expose the futility of workers wasting their time and energy in working for these ends' was submitted for inclusion on the 1919 Annual Conference agenda. In June the resolution was approved and became WSF policy. [18]

On the recommendation of a courier from the newly-formed Third International the Conference instructed the WSF Executive Committee to take steps towards linking up with the new International and with other communist groups in Britain. WSF delegates were told by the Executive Committee to 'stand fast' on the position of

'No Parliamentary Action' in their discussions with other groups. [19]

Guy Aldred's favourable comments about the WSF's attitude around this time indicate the extent of the change which had taken place in the WSF's views in the space of two years; in May 1919 Aldred observed that 'the Workers' Dreadnought, under the editorship of our comrade, Sylvia Pankhurst, has been making great strides intellectually speaking, and seems now to have become a definite Revolutionary Marxian Anarchist weekly with a clear outlook on the question of Soviet Republicanism as opposed to Parliamentarism'. [20]

In July 1919 Pankhurst attempted to enlist Lenin's support for the WSF's anti-parliamentary stance in the communist unity negotiations. In a letter to the Bolshevik leader she suggested that 'if you were here, I believe you would say: Concentrate your forces upon revolutionary action; have nothing to do with the Parliamentary machine. Such is my own view.' [21]

However, Pankhurst's belief was soon disillusioned when she received Lenin's reply. After a few conciliatory remarks about anti-parliamentarians being among 'the best, most honest and sincerely revolutionary representatives of the proletariat', Lenin announced that he personally was 'convinced that to renounce participation in parliamentary elections is a mistake for the revolutionary workers of England'. [22] This was not the sort of response that anti-parliamentarians in Britain had hoped or expected to receive. The example of the Russian revolution had been instrumental in causing the WSF to abandon notions that parliamentary action could play any role in the revolutionary struggle - how quickly Lenin had forgotten the lessons of his own revolution!

Furthermore, the little anti-parliamentarians in Britain knew about Bolshevism had led them to identify it with

the anarchist variety of anti-parliamentarism which inspired Aldred and his comrades. In *State and Revolution* (first published in English in 1919), Lenin had returned to Marx's *The Civil War in France* in order to revive the idea of smashing, rather than taking over, the existing state apparatus. In its own day Marx's argument had been regarded by his anarchist critics (such as Bakunin) as a retraction of his previous view that state power had to be conquered as a prelude to social change, and as an admission that anarchist views on this issue were correct. We have already seen how Guy Aldred based his opposition to John Maclean's parliamentary candidature on the arguments in *The Civil War in France*. Thus it is hardly surprising that Aldred should have regarded *State and Revolution*, which put forward the same line of argument, as one of the 'immense services rendered to the cause of the workers' world revolution by Lenin', [23] Reviewing Lenin's pamphlet in December 1919 Aldred wrote that the author, 'in showing the revolutionary one-ness of all that is essential in Marx with all that counts in Bakunin, has accomplished a wonderful work'. [24]

Aldred summed up his perception of the affinity between Bolshevism and anarchist anti-parliamentarism when he wrote: 'No man can be really and truly an Anarchist without becoming a Bolshevik... no man can be really and truly a Bolshevik without standing boldly and firmly on the Anarchist platform.' [25] Other anti-parliamentarians shared this view. For example, one of the topics which Willie McDougall of the Glasgow Anarchist Group spoke about when he toured Scotland as a Spur 'missionary' in the winter of 1919-20 was 'Lenin's Anarchy'. [26]

THE ANTI-PARLIAMENTARIANS AND THE FORMATION OF THE CPGB

The communist unity negotiations, which had provoked Pankhurst to seek Lenin's views, continued throughout the rest of 1919 and most of 1920. One of the most contentious issues was whether or not the communist party should engage in parliamentary action. There was basic agreement that Parliament was not a suitable administrative form for communist society and that the revolution would not be carried out through Parliament. Both of these tasks would be fulfilled by the workers' soviets. Disagreement arose, however, over whether or not Parliament could be put to any use pending the revolution. The British Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party supported the use of election campaigns for propaganda purposes and Parliament as a 'tribune' from which to make revolutionary speeches. These tactics were also advocated by the Bolsheviks who termed them 'Revolutionary Parliamentarism'. The other main participants in the negotiations -- the WSF and the South Wales Socialist Society -- opposed Revolutionary Parliamentarism in favour of complete abstention from any involvement in parliamentary activity.

Guy Aldred had already proposed the 'Sinn Fein' tactic as one attitude communists could adopt towards elections, and in October 1919 he suggested two other options. Communists could use elections to measure the level of support for communism and to 'demonstrate the supreme political strength and unity of the Communist Party, as a prelude to revolutionary action'. Alternatively, communists could 'organise a disciplined boycott of the ballot box'. Aldred favoured the organised boycott, but could support either tactic 'without any violation of principle'. [27]

The 'bottom line' of Aldred's position was that under no circumstances should successful communist candidates take their seats in Parliament; in his opinion Revolutionary Parliamentarism, which required communists to enter Parliament and use it as a platform for revolutionary propaganda, was a contradiction in terms, because 'there can only be revolutionism OR parliamentarianism'. [28] Lenin's support for the tactic was a 'fatal compromise'. [29]

When it became clear that unity in Britain would have to be based on terms dictated by the Bolsheviks, anti-parliamentarians such as Aldred therefore faced the choice of compromising their principles or excluding themselves from the unity negotiations. In May 1920 the Glasgow Anarchist Group had renamed itself the Glasgow Communist Group to express its support for communist unity, and announced that it stood for 'the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the Soviet Republic, anti-Parliamentary agitation, and the Third International'. At the same time, however, the Group had also stated that it would not be party to 'any Unity Convention willing to . . . support men and women sitting in the capitalist Parliament House'. [30] In October 1920 the Group acknowledged that this combination of views amounted to an untenable position when it declared that it had 'suspended' its support for the Third International 'until such time as that body repudiates its "wobbling" on the question of Parliamentary Action'. [31]

The WSF tried to pursue a different course of action. In August 1920 Aldred's comrade Rose Witcop criticised the WSF for having been 'prepared to waive the question of parliamentary action for the sake of unity'. [32] This seems to have been a fair assessment of the WSF's attitude during early 1920. Sylvia Pankhurst suggested that parliamentary action was 'not a matter of principle

but of tactics, always provided, or course, that Parliamentary action by Communists is used in a revolutionary manner'. [33] Within the WSF Executive Committee there was 'a very strong feeling against Parliamentary action,' but WSF delegates to the unity talks were advised that 'we might leave the question of Parliamentary Action to be worked out by the party as the situation developed'. [34] Contrary to most accounts of the unity negotiations, therefore, it was not parliamentary action which proved to be the insurmountable obstacle in the way of unity between the WSF and the other groups, but the other contentious issue of affiliation to the Labour Party.

After the announcement of a Communist Unity Convention to be held in London on 1 August at which policy decisions would be settled by majority votes binding on all participants, the WSF called an 'Emergency Conference' of 'left wing' communist groups (that is, those opposed to affiliation and parliamentary action). This was originally intended to enable the 'left wing' communists to plan their strategy in advance, since the proposed Unity Convention was bound to be dominated by 'right wing' (that is, pro-parliamentary and pro-affiliation) delegates. [35] In the event, however, the participants at the 'Emergency Conference' (held in London on 19-20 June) decided to take no further part in the unity negotiations. Instead, they proceeded to form themselves into the 'Communist Party (British Section of the Third International)' on a platform of seven 'cardinal points' which included 'refusal to engage in Parliamentary action'. [36]

Besides the WSF the other founder-members of the CP(BSTI) were the Aberdeen, Croydon and Holt Communist Groups, Gorton Socialist Society, the

Manchester Soviet, Stepney Communist League and the Labour Abstentionist Party. Fortunately it has been possible to discover a little about who some of these groups were and what they stood for.

An exchange of correspondence between the Aberdeen Communist Group and one of its critics was published in the Glasgow Forward in 1920. The critic paraphrased the Group's views as follows: 'Lenin has been guilty of some fatal compromise, and Guy Aldred is entirely wrong in seeking to use the ballot box in order to register the strength of his following. Johnnie Maclean is a reformist . . . Willie Gallacher is a job hunter.' In reply, William Greig of the Aberdeen group explained that it stood for a 'clear-cut Revolutionary, anti-Parliamentary, anti-Trade Union, anti-Reform policy'. He was opposed to trade unions because they split the working class into '1,300 different sections' and he described parliamentary elections as 'job hunting expeditions at the polling booths of the capitalist class'. [37]

The Stepney Communist League had been a founder-member of the national Communist League, formed on the initiative of the Socialist Labour Party's London District Council in March 1919 and consisting mainly of a few SLP branches plus some of the groups associated with Guy Aldred, such as the Glasgow Anarchist Group. The WSF was also affiliated. The League stood for the formation of workers' committees to 'resist all legislation and industrial action directed against the working class, and ultimately assuming all power, establish a working class dictatorship'. [38]

The Labour Abstentionist Party published its programme in May 1920. The Party's aim was 'The Collective Well-Being of the People', and its 'Tactical Methods' included 'Securing the election of Parliamentary Candidates pledged to abstain from taking their seats' and

'Propagation of the Futility of Parliamentary Action'.
[39]

The secretary/treasurer of the Labour Abstentionist Party, E. T. Whitehead, became secretary of the CP(BSTI) at the June conference and was soon soliciting Guy Aldred's support. Whitehead told Aldred that we are definitely against parliamentary action. This does not mean that we are necessarily against taking part in elections, but the party is against running candidates for the present. It will always be dead against any candidates taking their seats, and should it decide to run them, they would have to adopt your ['Sinn Fein'] programme as suggested by you in the May Spur. [40]

Aldred spurned Whitehead's approach: partly because he was opposed to the way in which the CP(BSTI)'s programme had been 'foisted on the movement' by a conference of 'delegates' with no real mandates from the groups they claimed to represent, but mainly because of the inconsistency of an avowedly anti-parliamentary organisation declaring itself the 'British Section' of an organisation committed to Revolutionary Parliamentarism. [41] This inconsistency, which had led the Glasgow Communist Group to 'suspend' its support for the Third International rather than compromise its adherence to anti-parliamentarism, perplexed the CP(BSTI) for several months after its formation, and the party's attempts to resolve the problem had fractious consequences.

In 'Left-Wing' Communism, An Infantile Disorder (written during April-May 1920). Lenin had just directed a strong attack against anti-parliamentary tendencies within the various Western European communist groups. Regarding the situation in Britain Lenin stated that 'British Communists should participate in parliamentary action' and that communist unity in Britain should be

based on 'obligatory participation in parliament'. [42] During the summer of 1920 extracts from Lenin's pamphlet were published in the revolutionary press in Britain. Because of the prestige Lenin enjoyed in the eyes of most British revolutionaries, his pamphlet undoubtedly exerted considerable influence in the debates about parliamentary action. This became clear when the decisive Communist Unity Convention was held on 31 July-I August. In a message addressed to the delegates Lenin repeated that he was 'in favour of participation in Parliament' [43] and it was duly decided by 186 votes to 19 that the Communist Party of Great Britain would adopt Revolutionary Parliamentarism as one of its tactics. At the same time, the Second Congress of the Third International was being held in Moscow. Various resolutions advocating Revolutionary Parliamentarism were adopted and the tactic was also included among the International's Twenty-One Conditions of Admission.

Lenin's pamphlet, his letter to the Communist Unity Convention, and the decisions of the Second Congress, all emphasised the conflict inherent in the CP(BSTI) declaring itself against parliamentary action and for the Third International. The British delegates to the Second Congress, Sylvia Pankhurst among them, left Russia with instructions to unite in a single party within four months of their return, on the political basis of the resolutions adopted by the Congress. Initially the CP(BSTI) remained defiant. At a conference in Manchester on 18-19 September it voted to accept the Third International's Conditions of Admission 'with the reservation that the passages referring to the discipline to be applied to parliamentary representatives does not affect our Party, which does not take Parliamentary action'. [44]

Soon afterwards, Sylvia Pankhurst outlined her views on what course of action the CP(BSTI) should follow. Arguing that the tactic of Revolutionary Parliamentarism was likely to be abandoned at the next Congress of the International, she advised the CP(BSTI) to accept the International's terms of admission and unite with the CPGB to form a single, united Communist Party in Britain. [45]

This advice was based on the impressions Pankhurst had formed whilst attending the Second Congress in Moscow. There had been a sizeable presence of anti-parliamentary delegates from various groups throughout Europe and America. Pankhurst believed that if they held to their views and grew in strength they would be able to form an anti-parliamentary majority by the time the Third Congress was held. Pankhurst also had informal discussions with Lenin, during which he told her that parliamentary action and affiliation to the Labour Party were 'not questions of principle at all, but of tactics, which may be employed advantageously in some phases of the changing situation and discarded with advantage in others. Neither question, in his opinion, is important enough to cause a split in the Communist ranks.' According to Pankhurst, Lenin 'dismissed' the issue of parliamentary action as 'unimportant'; if the decision to employ Parliamentary action had been a mistake it could be 'altered at next year's Congress'. [46] Judging by the advice Pankhurst gave the CP(BSTI), she seems to have been won over by Lenin's persuasive assurances.

Subsequently, at a conference in Cardiff on 4 December, the CP(BSTI) voted to accept fully all Statutes and Theses of the International -- although, once again, 'it was made abundantly clear in the argument that this vote did not mean that this party had in the slightest degree

changed its views on the advisability of Revolutionary Parliamentarism for Britain'. [47]

Not all CP(BSTI) members agreed with this decision. The four Manchester branches, which between them claimed to have 200 members (a third of the party's total membership), resigned from the party in protest, regarding the decision to unite with the CPGB on the basis of a programme including a commitment to parliamentary action as a 'sell-out' to parliamentarism.

[48] E. T. Whitehead replied that as far as he was aware 'no single member of this Party is prepared to be a member of a party which adopts revolutionary Parliamentarism as one of its tactics'. [49] Unity with the CPGB and affiliation to the Third International would involve joining organisations committed to the possibility of using Revolutionary Parliamentarism, but the CP(BSTI) would still be free to argue against the tactic ever being put into practice. To this end, Sylvia Pankhurst advised the anti-parliamentarians to 'keep together and form a strong, compact left block' within the CPGB and to 'insist that the constitution of the Party should leave them free to propagate their policy in the Party and in the Third International as a whole'. The Workers' Dreadnought would continue to appear, as 'an independent organ giving an independent support to the Communist Party from the Left Wing standpoint'. [50]

The CP(BSTI) finally united with the CPGB at a second Communist Unity Convention held in Leeds at the end of January 1921. This provoked an immediate response from those anti-parliamentarians who had doubted the compatibility of opposition to parliamentary action and support for the Third International. The Glasgow Communist Group began publication of a new paper (the Red Commune), because 'there is no other party organ in this country . . . that stands fearlessly for Communism.

They all urge or compromise with, in some shape or form, parliamentarianism.' The new platform of the Glasgow Communist Group advocated 'Anti-Parliamentary Activity; (a) Boycotting the Ballot Box; (b) Communist Anti-Parliamentary or Sinn Fein Candidature'. The Glasgow Group also invited all anti-parliamentarians to 'unite with us in an anti-Parliamentary Federation or Party'. [51] As a result a conference was held in Glasgow at Easter 1921 at which the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation was formed as a direct challenge to the pro-parliamentary CPGB. The Glasgow Communist Group became the Central Branch of the new organisation.

OPPOSITION TO PARLIAMENTARISM AFTER THE FORMATION OF THE CPGB

The CP(BSTI)'s expectation that it would be able to put forward anti-parliamentary views freely within the CPGB turned out to be mistaken. In September 1921 Sylvia Pankhurst was expelled from the CPGB because the Dreadnought's repeated criticisms of CPGB policy contravened party discipline as laid down in the Conditions of Admission. [52] Many of Pankhurst's comrades were forced out of the CPGB on similar charges.

The position that Aldred and the Glasgow Communist Group had adopted that anti-parliamentarism and support for the Third International were mutually exclusive commitments -- proved to be more perceptive. In 1921, while Aldred was serving a one-year prison sentence for sedition arising out of the publication of the Red Commune, Rose Witcop went to Russia to sound out the possibility of the APCF acquiring 'associate membership'

of the Third International. This could be granted to 'groups or parties . . . who in due course would be prepared to join the national Communist Party of their country'. Aldred was not prepared to contemplate unity with the CPGB, but 'he was not opposed to the mission seeking information and financial backing'. Witcop attended the Third Congress of the International and 'received promise of solid financial backing for the Spur, payment of all legal and other expenses of the High Court trial at Glasgow [the Red Commune sedition case], maintenance for Guy Aldred whilst in prison, and financial backing when liberated'. However, such support would only be given 'on condition that she could secure the promise by Aldred and the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation of acceptance of membership of the Communist Party and the Moscow line'. Since this would have required the APCF to abandon its anti-parliamentary principles, when Guy Aldred was released from prison in mid-1922 all contacts between the APCF and the Third International were severed. [53]

Following her expulsion from the CPGB Sylvia Pankhurst involved herself in efforts to regroup anti-parliamentary communists at a national and international level. The anti-parliamentary Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD), which had been excluded from the International following the Third Congress, had announced that it was forming a Fourth International. The Workers' Dreadnought quickly declared its support for the KAPD's initiative [54] and during the winter of 1921-2 Pankhurst began organising a Communist Workers' Party in Britain. In February 1922 the new party published a brief set of principles which included the statement that it was resolved 'to take no part in elections to Parliament and the local governing bodies,

and to carry on propaganda exposing the futility of Communist participation therein'. [55].

Anti-parliamentarianism also featured in the programme of the All-Workers' Revolutionary Union, an organisation formed on the Dreadnought group's initiative in September 1922. The AWRU was set up as 'One Big Union' which would unite workers in the struggle to overthrow capitalism and then function as the administrative machinery of the post-revolutionary communist society. The AWRU's statement of principles declared: 'The AWRU rejects all responsibility for the administration of the capitalist State or participation in the elections to Parliament and the local governing bodies.' [56]

The programmes adopted by the Communist Workers' Party and the All-Workers' Revolutionary Union set the tone for Sylvia Pankhurst's remarks about the general election held in November 1922:

'We expect nothing from the General Election. It belongs to the Capitalist civilisation which is nearing its end. With that civilisation Parliaments and Cabinets as we know them today will disappear. We are looking forward to the advent of Communism and its industrial councils.' [57]

In the November general election Guy Aldred fulfilled his intention of putting into practice the 'Sinn Fein' tactic by standing in the Glasgow constituency of Shettleston. This caused some dissension within the ranks of the APCF: the 'anarchist faction' within the group 'asserted its opposition to the use of the ballot box even as a weapon against parliamentarism', and the APCF refused to give official support to Aldred's campaign. The APCF's decision was somewhat inconsistent, considering that its forerunner, the Glasgow Communist Group, had endorsed the 'Sinn Fein' policy as a valid anti-

parliamentary tactic in the Red Commune in February 1921. Nevertheless, 'repudiating the election as a group, the comrades still helped, unenthusiastically, as comrades'. [58]

Aldred's election address stated: 'I stand for the complete and final overthrow of the present social system and the immediate establishment of a Socialist Commonwealth.' He rejected all canvassing, electioneering and promises of reforms. In opposition to 'the capitalist State and the Parliamentary system of Government', he urged workers to 'discover and evolve into a new political or social structure their power on the industrial field'. If elected he would refuse to swear the oath of allegiance to the monarchy or take his seat in Parliament. [59] The result was: J. Wheatley (Labour) 14 695 votes; T. Ramsay (National Liberal) 9704; G. Aldred (Communist) 470.

When the Glasgow Communist Group announced its support for the 'Sinn Fein' tactic in February 1921 the Workers' Dreadnought had commented: 'It is a puzzle to us how to reconcile the anti-parliamentarism of the platform of this Group with its tactics of running anti-parliamentary candidates pledged not to take the oath and pledged not to sit.' [60] Consequently, the Dreadnought criticised Guy Aldred's Shettleston campaign, dubbing him an 'Anti-Parliamentary Parliamentarian'. [61] In June 1923 Aldred and Pankhurst spoke in opposition to each other in a debate in London, and according to Aldred Pankhurst 'proclaimed herself a convinced anti-parliamentarian and again denounced my Shettleston candidature'. Aldred continued: 'In the Workers' Dreadnought for 7th July, 1923 Sylvia Pankhurst returned to her attack on me for the Shettleston campaign and again sneered from the absolute Anti-Parliamentarian standpoint of one who believed in boycotting the ballot box entirely'. [62]

When Sylvia Pankhurst visited Glasgow in November 1923 to address two Scottish Workers' Republican Party municipal election meetings, the APCF made the most of its opportunity to turn the tables. The SWRP had used a Dreadnought account of the Poplar Board of Guardians' instigation of a police baton charge on a demonstration of unemployed workers as the basis of a leaflet distributed when Poplar Board member George Lansbury addressed Glasgow Trades Council in October 1923. [63] This was the only link between Pankhurst and the SWRP, and Pankhurst claimed afterwards that she had spoken against parliamentarism at the two meetings. [64] However, her appearance on the platform of a group contesting twelve seats in the municipal elections proved irresistible to the APCF. They distributed a leaflet for the occasion entitled 'Sylvia's Anti-Parliamentary Comedy', in which Pankhurst's criticisms of Aldred were returned in good measure: How can the person who urges you to "boycott the ballot box" also advise you to "Vote Red Labour" [the SWRP's campaign slogan] . . . If it is wrong to support a candidate pledged not to take his seat, is it not more wrong to support candidates who intend to take their seats?.' [65]

Nevertheless, Pankhurst's appearance on the SWRP platform did not mean that she had changed her attitude towards elections or Parliament. During the 1923 general election she called for propaganda to expose the futility of involvement in Parliamentary elections. [66] The APCF also distributed leaflets urging workers to boycott the ballot box. [67] By the time of the 1924 general election the Workers' Dreadnought had ceased publication, but anti-parliamentary propaganda was sustained by the APCF, who repeated that workers 'have nothing to gain from voting. Consequently they should boycott the ballot box.' [68]

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION 1.

For better or worse the events of the Russian revolution and its aftermath influenced virtually all the areas of anti-parliamentary communist thought discussed in Chapters 1-4 of this account. Particular aspects of the revolution's impact-such as the way in which perceptions of the soviets' role during and after the revolution changed the WSF's view of Parliament as an instrument of social change -- are mainly dealt with in Chapters 1, 3 and 4. This chapter concentrates on the anti-parliamentary communists' interpretation of the revolution itself, their theoretical and practical responses to it, and their assessment of the changes which took place in Russia after 1917.

FROM THE FEBRUARY TO THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

During 1917 two demands dominated the WSF's propaganda: extension of the suffrage to every adult woman and man, and an end to the war. Because of these emphases in its own politics the WSF welcomed the February Revolution in Russia. The tyrannical Russian monarchy had been overthrown, clearing the way for government by a constituent assembly elected on the basis of universal suffrage. Moreover, since the overthrow of the Tsar had been motivated by war-weariness and a desire for peace on the part of the Russian workers and peasants, it seemed logical to conclude that these same workers and peasants would proceed to elect a government pledged to end Russia's involvement in the war. If this happened the other

belligerent countries would surely be quick to follow Russia's example.

The WSF's views were not shared by Guy Aldred and his comrades. Aldred conceded that the new Russian government might be 'more enlightened' than its predecessor and that a republic might be 'saner' than a monarchy, but if the experience of parliamentary democracy in Britain was anything to go by the establishment of a similar system in Russia gave little cause for celebration. 'We know that tomorrow, the apostle of socialism will be jailed again in Russia, for sedition and what not. And so "we do not celebrate the Russian revolution". We prefer to work for Socialism, for the only possible social revolution, that of the world's working-class against the world's ruling-class.' [1] Aldred and his comrades also differed from the WSF in their views about how to end the war. While the WSF regarded peace as something for the people to demand and for governments to negotiate, anti-parliamentarians such as Rose Witcop advocated direct action by the working class. 'The suggestion of telling the Government what we want points to the incapacity . . . to grip the spirit of the Russian people. In Russia they did not reason with or explain to the Czar . . . they just gave the Government to understand by downing their bayonets!'. In addition to the view implied by this remark -- that mutiny among the armed forces would be one way of bringing the war to an end -- Witcop also called for 'industrial action' and 'no bargaining with Governments'. [2]

Despite their contrasting responses to the February Revolution, writers in the *Spur* and the *Dreadnought* agreed that the struggle in Russia was unlikely to come to a halt at whatever had been achieved in February.

In October 1917 Glasgow Anarchist Group member Freda Cohen reported widespread dissatisfaction in the ranks of the Russian army and 'some rumour of the peasants seizing the land'. To all close observers of events it was obvious that the struggle going on in Russia was 'not, as it seemed at the beginning, simply a political or anti-Czarist one'. According to Cohen 'the struggle going on there in broad daylight, just reflects the self-same struggle that has been, and is going on underground, all over the world'. By this Cohen meant the class struggle between the capitalists and the working class, and she predicted that the Russian workers would not be content with 'settling down in the old work-a-day world with no other gain than a new set of masters and newly forged chains'. [3] Sylvia Pankhurst had hinted at a similar prognosis a few months earlier when she had asked rhetorically: 'Is it not plain that still the Russian Revolution is continuing: still the struggle is going on: still the hold of the capitalists is upon the country and only in part is it overthrown?' [4]

Following the February Revolution the Dreadnought had drawn attention to the situation of dual power which existed between the Provisional Government appointed by the Duma and the 'Council of Labour Deputies' responsible to workers and soldiers. [5] At the end of June 1917 it reported that the 'Council of Workers' And Soldiers' Deputies' was now capable of overthrowing the Provisional Government should it wish to do so. Discussing the various Russian political parties' attitudes towards this situation the Dreadnought explained that while the Mensheviks were disinclined to support any seizure of power by the workers' and soldiers' councils, The Maximalists and Leninites, on the other hand, desire to cut adrift from the capitalist parties altogether, and to establish a Socialist system of organisation and industry

in Russia, before Russian capitalism, which is as yet in its infancy, gains power and becomes more difficult than at present to overthrow. We deeply sympathise with this view. [6]

Thereafter the Dreadnought continued to note the growing strength of the Bolsheviks and to express its agreement with their aims. In August, for example, mass desertions from the army and rapidly-falling living standards in Petrograd were said to be winning support for 'the position adopted at the outset by Leninnamely, that Free Russia must refuse to continue fighting in a capitalist War'. The Dreadnought added that Lenin's view was 'a position which we ourselves have advocated from the first. [7]

At the end of September the Dreadnought reported with 'great satisfaction' that 'the Socialists who are variously called Bolsheviks, Maximalists and Leninites have secured a majority on the Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates'. For the benefit of its readers the report outlined the main points of the Bolshevik programme:

The Maximalists are the International Socialists who recognise that this is a capitalist War and demand an immediate peace, and who desire to establish in Russia not a semi-Democratic Government and the capitalist system such as we have in England, but a Socialist State. They desire Socialism, not in some far away future, but in the immediate present. The Maximalists desire that the CWSD [Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates] shall become the Government of Russia until the Elections for the Constituent Assembly have taken place. [8]

Finally, when it heard that the Bolsheviks had seized power in the October Revolution the Dreadnought announced its wholehearted Support for this turn of

events: 'the latest revolt of the Russian Revolution, the revolt with which the name of Lenin is associated, has been brought about in order that the workers of Russia may no longer be disinherited and oppressed. This revolt is the happening which definitely makes the Russian Revolution of the twentieth century the first of its kind'. The seizure of power was described as a 'Socialist Revolution' with 'aims and ideals' which were 'incompatible with those of capitalism'. [9]

The Spur's immediate reaction echoed this assessment of the October Revolution's nature and historic significance. An article signed by 'Narodnik' drew comparisons with the French Revolution of 1789; like its historic predecessor, the October Revolution was 'a social revolution in the fullest meaning of the word: a radical changing of all the economic, political and social arrangements; a grand attempt to reconstruct the whole structure of society, upon an entirely new foundation'. [10]

WAR AND INTERVENTION

While the Spur group regarded the October Revolution as a herald of the social revolution of the world's working class against the world's ruling class to which Guy Aldred had referred after the February Revolution, the WSF welcomed it more as a blow struck for world peace, and responded by demanding the conclusion of a peace to end the world war and by campaigning against Allied military intervention in Russia.

In contrast to the Bolsheviks revolutionary defeatist wartime slogan of 'turn the imperialist war into civil war', the peace appeals issued by the new Bolshevik government called for a 'just, democratic peace' based on

no annexations, no indemnities, and the right of nations to self-determination. This policy, which 'contained an element of calculated appeal to American opinion and to such radical opinion in other countries as might be sympathetic to it', [11] immediately struck a sympathetic chord with the WSF. Sylvia Pankhurst had already suggested in August 1917 that the WSF should make a new banner bearing the slogan 'Negotiate For Peace On The Russian Terms: No Annexations: No Indemnities', [12] and after the October Revolution Pankhurst's articles in the Workers' Dreadnought frequently linked the call for peace on these terms with the fact that these were also the Bolsheviks' demands. In December 1917, for example, Pankhurst stated: 'We take our stand on the Russian declaration: "No annexations, no indemnities, the right of the peoples to decide their own destiny".' [13]

When peace negotiations between Russia and Germany opened at Brest-Litovsk towards the end of 1917, the WSF argued that other belligerent governments should follow Russia's example -- 'The Russian Socialist Government is showing us the way to obtain a just Peace' -- and urged the British labour movement to give 'strong backing for the Russian negotiators at Brest-Litovsk'. [14] While the talks were in progress Sylvia Pankhurst pointed out that 'whilst some capitalist sections would endeavour to cajole the Russian Socialists [such as the German government, which had agreed to negotiate], others would coerce them'. [15] Opposition to such coercers' -- governments which sought to overthrow the Bolshevik regime by military intervention and aid to the Bolsheviks' internal enemies - became the predominant element in the WSF's response to the Russian revolution after Russia's withdrawal from the war in March 1918. Harry Pollitt recalled that his

'main sphere of activity at this time was with the Workers' Socialist Federation, doing propaganda for Russia. Sylvia Pankhurst was, of course, the leading spirit in the Federation . . . I covered the greater part of London with her group. We held meetings on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings, afternoons and evenings'. Even 20 years later, by which time he had become a high-ranking member of the CPGB, Pollitt's experience of working with the WSF in the anti-interventionist 'Hands Off Russia' campaign forced him to admit that the WSF had been 'made up of the most self-sacrificing and hard-working comrades it has been my fortune to come in contact with'. [16] This gives a revealing insight into the importance which the WSF attached to opposing intervention, and the amount of time and effort which it put into the campaign. Opposition to intervention was also a persistent theme of Sylvia Pankhurst's articles about international affairs in the Workers' Dreadnought until the threat of intervention finally came to an end in the autumn of 1920.

The WSF's campaign against intervention was aimed at three targets. One of these was the British government. In March 1918 Sylvia Pankhurst wrote of the 'urgent need that the Governments of all Europe should feel the pressure of the workers in their respective countries to prevent the crushing of Socialism in Russia'. [17] At its 1918 Annual Conference the WSF called on the British government to bestow legal recognition on its Russian counterpart and to initiate peace negotiations on the Bolshevik terms of no annexations, no indemnities and the right of nations to decide their own destinies. [18]

Secondly, the WSF's campaign was intended to influence the organised labour movement in Britain. A Dreadnought editorial addressed to delegates attending the January 1918 Labour Party conference urged the

labour movement to 'bring every means at its disposal to support the Russian Socialist Government, the first working class Government that the world has ever seen'. [19] This meant protesting against foreign intervention in Russia.

Thirdly, the WSF's campaign was aimed at rank and file workers. At the end of 1919 the WSF demanded recognition of the Russian government, withdrawal of aid to its internal enemies and an end to intervention, and called for the organisation of a rank and file conference to make these demands and to censure the leaders of the Labour Party, TUC and Triple Alliance for their failure to organise militant opposition to intervention. [20] In July 1918 the WSF participated in the formation of a People's Russian Information Bureau which was intended to increase British workers' awareness of developments in Russia and so arouse them from their role as 'passive spectators' and 'inarticulate tools in the great struggle between the old regime of capitalism and the uprising workers of the world'. [21] The WSF believed that workers in the Allied countries held 'the key to the situation', since 'the International Capitalist war against the Workers' Soviet Republics cannot be carried on a day without the assistance of Allied workers'. Accordingly, in July 1918 the WSF called for a 'Workers' Blockade Of The Counter-Revolution', by means of an international general strike which would force the 'International Capitalists' to make peace with the 'Soviet Republics'. [22]

In the main, therefore, the WSF's efforts were directed towards encouraging workers in Britain to act as a pressure group to try to influence the British government's policies in favour of the interests of the Russian government. Only occasionally did the Dreadnought hint at a different approach to the survival

of the Bolshevik regime. In April 1919 Sylvia Pankhurst argued that the 'most effectual way' to end 'the war against the Soviets of Russia' would be to 'set up the Soviets in Britain'. [23] Similarly, on May Day 1920 she wrote that there would be no peace with the Russian regime, nor with any other 'Communist republic' which might be established, 'whilst capitalism rules the powerful nations of the world'. [24] These comments suggested that the fate of the Russian revolution depended on the overthrow of capitalism elsewhere in the world -- that the best way to defend the Bolshevik regime would be to attack the capitalist regimes. As will become apparent later, however, the infrequency with which the WSF put forward such a line of argument is particularly significant in view of the Dreadnought group's subsequent reappraisal of the events of this period.

'SOCIALISM IN THE MAKING'

The amount of time and energy which the WSF put into the 'Hands Off Russia' campaign invites an examination of what the WSF thought it would be protecting when it called for defence of Soviet Russia.

Several of the comments quoted already from the Workers Dreadnought referred to the 'socialist' or 'working class' government in Russia, and to Russia as a 'soviet' or 'workers' republic. The WSF believed that the October Revolution had given the Russian working class control of state power. This belief was based on the view that the soviets or workers' councils were in charge of post-revolutionary Russian society. Since the soviets were exclusively working-class organisations, and Russia was being ruled by the soviets, this meant that the

working class was now exercising its own power over society as a whole.

The Dreadnought's accounts of the changes taking place in Russia after the revolution were frequently published under the headline 'Socialism In The Making', implying that the Russian working class was presiding over a society in which socialism was being built. The ideas which the anti-parliamentarians put forward during 1919-21 concerning this notion of a 'transitional period' provide one of the most striking examples of how the Russian revolution and its aftermath made an impact on the views of the anti-parliamentary communists in Britain.

In August 1921 Sylvia Pankhurst wrote: 'Frankly, we do not believe that society will reorganise itself without the use of force on both sides, because the present system is maintained by force.' [25] In its attempts to seize and maintain power the working class would encounter violent resistance from the ruling class. The revolutionary period would be akin to 'civil war'. [26] The Dreadnought group repeatedly argued that for the duration of this period of revolutionary civil war the working class would have to exercise a dictatorship over the rest of society through its soviets. [27] This was a view shared by Guy Aldred and his comrades. In 1920 Aldred wrote of the need for a transitional period during which the workers must protect the revolution and organise to crush the counter-revolution. Every action of the working-class during that period must be organised, must be power-action, and consequently dictatorial.' [28] When the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' became a contentious issue amongst anarchists who interpreted anarchy literally as the abolition of all authority, Aldred insisted that 'there can be no efficient pursuit of working class emancipation without the establishment of the

proletarian dictatorship'. [29] He was, moreover, quite prepared to defend the implication of this view -- that anarchists who did not support the dictatorship were in effect counter-revolutionaries: 'those Anarchists who oppose the dictatorship of the proletariat as a transitional measure are getting dangerously near assisting the cause of the reactionaries, though their motives may be the highest. As a believer in the class struggle, I do not share their infatuation for abstract liberty at the expense of real social liberty.' [30]

Supporters of the proletarian dictatorship saw it as a temporary expedient: 'The dictatorship in so far as it is genuine and defensible, is the suppression by Workers' Soviets of capitalism and the attempt to re-establish it. This should be a temporary state of war.' [31] The dictatorship would be necessary until the counter-revolution had been quelled and the expropriated ruling class had 'settled down to accept the new order'. [32] With the disappearance of social classes, the dictatorship - initially the political expression of working-class power over the rest of society - would gradually wither away: 'As the counter-revolution weakens, the Soviet Republic will lose its political character and assume purely useful administrative functions'. [33]

Pending the achievement of a completely classless society, however, the working class would have to adopt a series of transitional measures. As long as the state of civil war continued the workers would have to disarm the ex-ruling class and create their own 'Red Army'. [34] Anyone attempting to reintroduce economic exploitation or refusing to undertake socially useful work would be deprived of political rights: 'No person may vote, or be elected to the Soviets who refuses to work for the community, who employs others for private gain, engages in private trading, or lives on accumulated

wealth. In the Soviet community such persons will soon cease to exist.' [35] This system would be enforced in part through the administration of 'revolutionary justice' by judges elected by and answerable to the soviets. [36] During the transitional period work would be compulsory for everyone. Sylvia Pankhurst suggested that 'in the early stages before the hatred of work born of present conditions has disappeared, the community might decide that an adult person should show either a certificate of employment from his workshop or a certificate from his doctor when applying for supplies from the common storehouse'. [37] In other words the compulsion to work would come from material necessity, since only those people who had first made a contribution to production would be allowed to satisfy their needs from the communal storehouses.

Sylvia Pankhurst was explicit that during the transitional period a wages system would still exist: 'after long experience of Capitalism . . . it would be difficult to abolish the wage system altogether, without first passing through the stage of equal wages'. [38] No indication was given of how long this 'stage' or 'era' might have to last, nor was there any suggestion as to how the step from the equal wages system to a wageless society might be effected. Equal wages would be accompanied by free provision of staple necessities and 'equal rationing of scarce commodities' until the application of technology began to produce wealth in abundant quantities. [39]

Workers' labour power was not the only commodity which would be subject to buying and selling during the transitional period. The CP(BSTI)'s programme assumed that all exchange transactions should be under the exclusive control of the state: 'For the period in which money and trading shall continue, local and national

Soviet banks will be set up and shall be the only banks.'
[40]

Practically all the features of the anti-parliamentarians' description of the transitional period were also features of early post-revolutionary Russia. During 1918-20 a civil war raged as the White forces and foreign powers tried to overthrow the newly-established Bolshevik regime. The Red Army was created to defend the state against this onslaught. During the same period the economic system known as War Communism came into being. Work became, in effect, compulsory for all: 'On every wall . . . "He who does not work, neither shall he eat", was blazoned abroad.' [41] Staple necessities were provided free and scarce commodities strictly rationed: 'At its lowest, in the first quarter of 1921, only 6.8 per cent of "wages" were paid in money, the rest being issued free in the form of goods and services.' [42] Efforts were made to reduce wage differentials with the aim of achieving equality of wages. The State Bank and all private banks were seized, nationalised and amalgamated into the People's Bank of the Russian Republic. State finance came under the control of the Supreme Council of National Economy. Attempts were made to bring all trade under state control: there was 'a resolute attempt to suppress free trade in essentials. Private trade in a wide range of consumers' goods was forbidden.' [43]

Thus the anti-parliamentary communists in Britain used the specific experience of post-revolutionary Russia as a model for all future communist revolutions. This reveals a great deal about the anti-parliamentarians' view of the Russian revolution and the society which emerged afterwards. They would not have generalised from the Russian example in such a manner had they not believed that the October Revolution had been a working-class,

communist revolution, and that Russian society after 1917 was in the midst of a transition towards a communist society.

THE 'REVERSION TO CAPITALISM'

While such an assessment sums up the anti-parliamentarians' view of Russia during the first three years after the revolution, a very different point of view emerged thereafter. Until 1921 the anti-parliamentarians believed that although the Russian workers had not yet achieved their final goal they were still progressing in the right direction. What characterised the Dreadnought's analysis from the end of 1921 onwards, however, was the identification of a reversal in the direction of events - in fact, a 'reversion to capitalism'. [44]

An early intimation of this view appeared in the Dreadnought in September 1921, when Sylvia Pankhurst referred to 'the drift to the Right in Soviet Russia, which has permitted the re-introduction of many features of Capitalism'. Pankhurst also noted 'strong differences of opinion amongst Russian Communists and throughout the Communist International as to how far such retrogression can be tolerated'. In the same issue of the Dreadnought A. Ironie drew attention to the recent re-establishment of payment for basic necessities, restoration of rents, and reinstatement of property to expropriated owners. Ironie argued that the Bolsheviks could not 'justify their claims to being the means of transition towards common-ownership whilst the decrees quoted above witness a retrogression in the opposite direction'. [45]

These two articles marked the beginning of the Dreadnought group's thoroughgoing reassessment of the society which had emerged in Russia.

Whereas in August 1918 the Dreadnought had reported that the revolution had established a system of collective workers' control of industry, [46] in January 1922 Sylvia Pankhurst argued that 'in Russia, as a matter of fact . . . there is an antagonism between the workers and those who are administering industry'. A 'theoretically correct Soviet community' where 'the workers, through their Soviets, which are indistinguishable from them, should administer' had 'not been achieved'. [47]

During the earliest days of the revolution the Dreadnought had also applauded the expropriation of large landowners and the redistribution of land amongst the peasantry. In May 1922, however, Pankhurst cited 'the fact that the land of Russia is privately worked by the peasants' as evidence that socialism did not exist in Russia. [48]

The Dreadnought's belief that the Russian working class exercised a dictatorship over society through its soviets was also called into question. In July 1923 Sylvia Pankhurst wrote that 'the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" has been used to justify the dictatorship of a party clique of officials over their own party members and over the people at large'. [49]

One of Pankhurst's last articles in the Dreadnought on the subject of Russia and the Bolsheviks made a wholly unfavourable assessment of the party she had once admired for its apparent determination to establish socialism 'in the immediate present', and of the country previously taken as a model for the post-revolutionary society. The Bolsheviks, Pankhurst wrote, pose now as the prophets of centralised efficiency, trustification, State control, and the discipline of the

proletariat in the interests of increased production . . . the Russian workers remain wage slaves, and very poor ones, working, not from free will, but under compulsion of economic need, and kept in their subordinate position by . . . State coercion. [50]

As we have seen, the Dreadnought group's ideas about the Post-revolutionary transition to communism were modelled on the period when the policy of War Communism was in operation in Russia. In February 1921, however, War Communism was abandoned in favour of the New Economic Policy (NEP). This was regarded by the Dreadnought group as the decisive turning-point in the fortunes of the revolution. Between March and August 1921 private trade was legalised and an agricultural tax in kind introduced (allowing peasants to sell their surplus produce for profit); small-scale nationalisation was revoked; leasing of enterprises to private individuals began; and payment of wages in cash, charges for services, and the operation of trade and industry on an explicitly commercial basis, were all instituted. Thus in September 1921, when Pankhurst first referred to Russia's 'reversion to capitalism', she supported her argument by pointing to the 're-introduction of many features of Capitalism, such as school fees, rent, and charges for light, fuel, trains, trams and so on'. The 'retrogressive' changes noted by A. Ironie were also introduced under the NEP. [51] The Dreadnought group's belief in the direct links between the abandonment of War Communism, the introduction of the NEP, and the 'revival of capitalism' was made explicit in December 1921, when Sylvia Pankhurst referred to 'Russia's "new economic policy" of reversion to capitalism'. [52]

The following two years witnessed a series of events which the Dreadnought group interpreted as confirming

its view that the introduction of the NEP had set Russia on course for a return to capitalism. The first such event occurred in December 1921, when the Executive Committee of the Communist International adopted the United Front tactic. The Dreadnought group regarded this as complementary to the NEP: the latter made concessions to capitalism within Russia, the former advocated co-operation with capitalist parties outside Russia. In Pankhurst's opinion, the adoption of the tactic proved that 'the Russian Soviet Government and those under its influence have abandoned the struggle for the International Proletarian Revolution and are devoting their attention to the capitalist development of Soviet Russia'. [53]

Shortly after denouncing the United Front the Dreadnought reported that the Russian government had invited people with technical qualifications to emigrate to Russia to exploit coal and iron concessions in the Kuznets Basin area. Sylvia Pankhurst saw that the 'Kuzbas' scheme would regenerate capitalist social relations between owners of capital and wage labourers, and asked: 'What is to become of the Russian workers' dream of controlling their own industry through their industrial soviets? . . . for the natives of Kuzbas, it seems that another Revolution will be needed to free them from the proposed yoke.' [54]

Russia's participation at the Genoa conference in April 1922 -- convened after a meeting of Allied industrialists had agreed that Europe's economic recovery depended on 'large-scale investment in Soviet Russia' and 'the exploitation of Russian resources' [55] -- was regarded as further proof of the Bolsheviks' willingness to place Russian workers 'under the yoke of the foreign capitalist', and that 'the principles of Communism in Russia' were 'being surrendered'. [56]

Another apparent indication of the Bolshevik regime's surrender to capitalism was pointed out in 1923, when the German Communist Party was attempting to organise insurrections in various regions of Germany. Trotsky was reported as having ruled out Russian intervention in Germany even if events reached the point of civil war and revolution, since the Russian government was more interested in maintaining the confidence of the foreign capitalists who had invested in Russia: 'Leon Trotzki and his colleagues are prepared to put their trade with international capitalists and the agreements they have made with capitalist firms, before Communism, before the proletarian revolution and the pledge they have made to the German comrades to come to their aid in the hour of need.' [57]

The events outlined above were regarded by the Dreadnought group as symptoms of Russia's 'reversion to capitalism'. When it came to suggesting causes the group put forward an explanation which can be separated into five inter-related parts.

First, the group adhered to the view that all societies had to pass through certain stages of historical development. The Bolsheviks' attempt to establish socialism in a basically feudal society had been 'in defiance of the theory that Russia must pass through capitalism before it can reach Communism'. The Bolsheviks had 'made themselves the slaves of that theory' [58] because they had found it impossible to leap straight from feudalism to communism and consequently had been forced to take on the task of initiating the era of capitalism themselves. The theory of stages of development was bound up with the anti-parliamentary communists' view of communism as a society of free access to wealth. If capitalism had not fulfilled its historic role of developing the forces of production to the point where production of wealth in

abundance became possible, one of communism's essential preconditions would be lacking and any attempt to establish a communist society would founder. Thus 'the state of Russia's economic development and the material conditions with which she is faced' had 'rendered inevitable the failure of the Soviet Government to maintain a fighting lead in the world revolutionary struggle'. [59]

Secondly, the Dreadnought group regarded the Russian peasantry as an anti-communist force: 'In Russia the ideal of the land worker was to produce for himself on his own holding and to sell his own products, not to work in co-operation with others.' Socialism would find 'its most congenial soil in a society based on mutual aid and mutual dependence', not in a country where an individualistic peasantry overwhelmingly outnumbered any other class. [60] In 1917 Sylvia Pankhurst had welcomed the redistribution of land among the peasants; later, she criticised the Bolsheviks for having done exactly what she herself had once recommended: 'Instead of urging the peasants, and leading the peasants, to seize the land and cut it up for individual ownership, the right course was to have endeavoured to induce them to seize the land for common ownership, its products being applied to common use.' The Bolsheviks' support for individual rather than common ownership -- an attempt to 'save time by refraining from bringing the land workers to a state of communism' -- had led 'directly and inevitably to reaction'. [61]

A third part of the explanation for the 'reversion to capitalism' concerned working-class control of production. The Dreadnought argued that 'until the workers are organised industrially on Soviet lines, and are able to hold their own and control industry, a successful Soviet Communist revolution cannot be

carried through, nor can Communism exist without that necessary condition'. [62] This necessary condition had not been fulfilled in Russia; 'though the Soviets were supposed to have taken power, the Soviet structure had yet to be created and made to function'. [63] To support this view the Dreadnought quoted the Bolshevik Kamenev's report to the seventh All-Russian Congress of Soviets in 1920: 'Even where Soviets existed, their general assemblies were often rare, and when held, frequently only listened to a few speeches and dispersed without transacting any real business'. [64] Such evidence led the Dreadnought to abandon its view that Russian industry was controlled by the workers through their own industrial soviets: 'Administration has been largely by Government departments, working often without the active, ready co-operation, sometimes even with the hostility of groups of workers who ought to have been taking a responsible share in administration. To this cause must largely be attributed Soviet Russia's defeat on the economic front.' [65]

This reference to administration by government departments, as opposed to by the workers themselves, leads to the fourth part of the Dreadnought's explanation. In one of the first Dreadnought articles questioning the authenticity of Russia's claims to communism, A. Ironie had written: 'The realisation of Communism, i.e., not Communist Partyism, but the common-ownership and use of the means of production, and the common enjoyment of the products, still remains a problem to be solved by the creative genius of the people freely organising themselves; or not at all.' [66] Ironie's counter-position of the party and the self-organised working class implied that the interests of the Bolsheviks and those of the Russian workers had conflicted. Only the conscious participation of the whole working class

would assure the success of the communist revolution; Ironie's remarks suggested that this essential precondition had been lacking in Russia. Any attempt to establish communism by a small group acting on behalf of the working class would result only in the dictatorial rule of a minority -- not communism, but Communist-Partyism.

The final part of the explanation put forward by the anti-parliamentary communists focused on the failure of working-class revolution elsewhere in Europe, and the Russian regime's consequent isolation. Sylvia Pankhurst argued that other countries' 'failure to become Communist' held back 'the progress of Russian Communism'. [67] There was a limit to the advances the revolution could make, surrounded by a hostile capitalist world. Ultimately, the Bolsheviks' fate would depend on whether or not the revolution could be extended beyond Russia's boundaries. The introduction of the NEP -- seen as inaugurating the 'reversion to capitalism' -- was attributed to 'the pressure of encircling capitalism and the [revolutionary] backwardness of the Western democracies'. [68] Russia's isolation could be overcome either through the world revolution or through succumbing to the pressure of encircling capitalism and compromising with the capitalist powers. In the Dreadnought group's opinion the Bolsheviks had concluded that the first of these options was no longer viable; consequently, the second option had been forced upon them. In November 1922 Sylvia Pankhurst wrote in an Open Letter to Lenin: 'It seems that you have lost faith in the possibility of securing the emancipation of the workers and the establishment of world Communism in our time. You have preferred to retain office under Capitalism than to stand by Communism and fall with it if need be.' [69] The symptoms of the 'reversion to

capitalism' -- outlined earlier -- were all taken as evidence of the Bolsheviks' determination to retain state power, even at the cost of Russia's reintegration into the world capitalist economy and the abandonment of communism. While the Dreadnought group argued that the failure of revolutions elsewhere in Europe had forced the Bolsheviks to break their isolation by negotiating with capitalist governments, other anti-parliamentary communists pointed out that the converse was also true: these same negotiations acted as a brake on the emergence of revolution outside Russia. At the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921 the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD) delegate Sachs observed that agreements and treaties which contributed to Russia's economic progress also strengthened capitalism in the countries with which the treaties were concluded . . . Sachs referred to an interview given by Krasin to the Rote Fahne in which the British miners' strike was said to have interfered with the execution of the Anglo-Soviet Trade agreement. [70]

A similar observation had been made by Guy Aldred in 1920. When he learned of Lenin's support for Revolutionary Parliamentarism Aldred was strongly critical of this tactic, yet he realised why Lenin had been forced into making his 'Fatal Compromise': 'Circumstances are compelling [Lenin] to give up his dream of an immediate world revolution and to concentrate on conserving and protecting the Russian revolution.' [71] Such compromises would be 'inevitable until the world revolution makes an end of the present false position in which Lenin and his colleagues find themselves'. [72] Yet the reformist policies of the Communist International could also reinforce Russia's isolation. Lenin was counting on the support of parliamentary reformists in Western Europe to bring

temporary protection to the Russian regime, but the regime in Russia could only be saved permanently by the world revolution. It was not the parliamentary reformists who would inaugurate this revolution, but the anti-parliamentary communists, on whom Lenin had now turned his back:

Desiring not to weaken the Russian revolution by declaring war on the political opportunists and parliamentarians, Lenin has succeeded in endangering that revolution by proclaiming war on the anti-parliamentarians and so on the world revolution itself. [73]

The reformist policies advocated by Lenin caused Aldred and his comrades to 'suspend' their support for the Communist International. Lenin had chosen to take whatever measures were necessary to defend the Bolshevik regime; the Spur group had chosen to continue to work for the world revolution. 'Lenin's task compels him to compromise with all the elect of bourgeois society whereas ours demands no compromise. And so we take different paths and are only on the most distant speaking terms'. [74]

THE CAPITALIST STATE AND THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL

When Aldred argued that the different priorities chosen by Lenin and the Spur group had forced them to part company, it was tantamount to arguing that the Bolshevik regime's interests no longer coincided with, or were perhaps even opposed to, those of the world revolution. There was the potential in Aldred's argument to conclude that since the Bolshevik-dominated Communist International was the instrument of the

Russian regime's foreign policy, if the policies of the Communist International were counter-revolutionary it could only be because the Russian regime itself was also counterrevolutionary.

This was the argument put forward by some anti-parliamentary communist groups, such as the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD). Following its exclusion from the Communist International after the Third Congress in 1921, the KAPD initiated the formation of a new, Fourth International -- the Communist Workers' International, or KAI. The Manifesto of the KAI argued that 1917 had been a 'dual revolution': 'In the large towns it was a change from capitalism to Socialism; in the country districts the change from feudalism to capitalism, in the large towns, the proletarian revolution came to pass; in the country the bourgeois revolution.' Initially, the incompatible objectives of the communist working class and the capitalist peasantry had been submerged in an alliance against their common enemy, the feudal aristocracy, but once this ruling class had been overthrown and the counter-revolution suppressed the 'absolute, insurmountable contradictions -- class contradictions' --between the working class and the peasants burst forth. The Bolsheviks capitulated to peasant demands in 1921 when they brought in the New Economic Policy, which introduced 'capitalist production for profit for the whole of agricultural Russia'. Production for profit in industry soon followed. As with every other nation state, Russia's foreign policy was shaped by its dominant domestic interests. Since the NEP had turned Russia into a 'peasant-capitalist' state, 'the desires and interests of the peasants in their capacity as capitalist owners of private property' were now 'directing the course of the Soviet Government in foreign

policy'. And since 'The Third Congress of the Third International has definitely and indissolubly linked the fate of the Third International to present Soviet Russia', the policies of the International were now being dictated by the interests of a capitalist state. [75]

The starting-point of the KAPD's critique -- its opposition to policies adopted by the Communist International -- was shared by Guy Aldred. But unlike the German left communists, Aldred did not explain the objectively counter-revolutionary nature of the Communist International's policies by reference to the counter-revolutionary character of the Russian regime. There were two main reasons for this. First, Aldred and his comrades maintained a distinction between the policies pursued internationally by the Bolsheviks, through their control of the Communist International, and the policies they pursued domestically through their control of the Russian government. The former may have been counter-revolutionary, but in Aldred's opinion this did not necessarily imply that the same could be said of the latter. Compared to the KAPD and the Dreadnought group, in fact, Aldred and his comrades were remarkably uncritical of the Russian regime. In November 1923, for example, in an article headlined 'Hail Soviet Russia!!', Aldred wrote: 'To the Communist International we send our greetings and declare that there can be no united front with parliamentary labourism and reformism . . . The Communist International must be Anti-Parliamentarian in action and stand for the unity of the revolutionary left.' In other words, Aldred's differences with the Third International were essentially tactical disagreements over Revolutionary Parliamentarism and the United Front. Although the International had adopted certain mistaken policies, it remained at heart a sound revolutionary organisation. In the same article, Aldred's

criticisms of the International were strictly separated from his remarks about the Russian regime itself, for which he had nothing but praise: 'This month Soviet Russia celebrates her sixth birthday. We send our revolutionary greetings to our comrades, the Russian Workers and Peasants, who have triumphed over all forces of counter-revolution and pestilence, and made Russia the beacon light of socialist struggle and the Soviet principle the rallying point of the world's toilers.'

[76]

3 THE LABOUR PARTY

Despite the limitations imposed by their relatively small numbers, the anti-parliamentary communist groups made every effort to involve themselves actively in the struggles of their fellow workers. This forced them to take up positions with regard to organisations and ideas which were dominant within the working class and through which workers' struggles were channelled. In terms of their numerical support and entrenchment within the working class, the most important of these organisations were the Labour Party and trade unions. The two remaining chapters of Part I are devoted to an examination of the anti-parliamentarians' attitudes towards these organisations.

GUY ALDRED AND THE LABOUR PARTY

Guy Aldred's account of his 'conversion' to revolutionary politics in 1906 hints at the basic elements of the anti-parliamentary communist attitude towards the Labour Party : 'My Anti-Parliamentarian and Socialist Revolt against Labourism dates from the elevation of John Burns to Cabinet rank, and the definite emergence of the Labour Party as a factor in British politics.' [1] A significant point is the connection drawn between the rise of the Labour Party and Aldred's opposition to parliamentarism. The anti-parliamentary communists believed that parliamentary action inevitably led to reformism, careerism and responsibility for the administration of capitalism. Aldred argued, for example, that 'Parliamentarism is careerism and the betrayal of Socialism', [2] and that 'all parliamentarism is reformism and opportunism'. [3] In 1906 30 of the

Labour Party's 51 general election candidates were elected to Parliament. Thereafter, according to the anti-parliamentary point of view, the Labour Party could not avoid being anything but a careerist, reformist and opportunist organisation.

Every criticism which the anti-parliamentary communists made of parliamentary action in general was also applicable to the Labour Party in particular. When Labour candidates stood for election, like all other candidates they had to seek votes from 'an electorate anxious for some immediate reform'; consequently, 'the need for social emancipation' was set aside 'in order to pander to some passing bias for urgent useless amelioration'. [4] Labour's pursuit of electoral success could thus be said to be at the root of its reformism.

Aldred also argued that parliamentarians were primarily professional politicians whose own careers took precedence over the need for social change :

the Labour movement is regarded as carrion by the parliamentary birds of prey, who start in the gutter, risk nothing, and rise to place in class society . . . the emotions of the careerist belong to the moment and express only one concern : how to exploit human wrong in order to secure power.

The careerist exploits grievances. He never feels them. He never comes to grips with them. He never attempts to remove them. He uses grievances as stepping stones to office and then mocks those who have suffered. [5]

Thus a second significant point in Aldred's explanation of his arrival at the anti-parliamentary position is his reference to John Burns' career. Burns -- one of fourteen children in a working-class family -- was originally a member of the Social Democratic Federation and one of the 1889 dockers' strike leaders. In 1892 he was elected to Parliament on the Labour ticket, but tended to favour

an alliance with progressive Liberals and did not look favourably on attempts to form an independent labour party. At the conference in 1900 which established the Labour Representation Committee, he declared himself 'tired of working class boots, working class houses, working class trains and working class margarine'. [6] By 1906 he had become President of the Local Government Board in the Liberal government. From the anti-parliamentary point of view Burns' career was seen as typical of the parliamentarians whose elevation from 'the gutter' to 'place in class society' was invariably accompanied by a steady rightwards evolution in political outlook.

The anti-parliamentarians also argued that by participating in Parliament the Labour Party upheld the class state and the capitalist system. Believing that the working class's revolutionary interests could not be expressed through Parliament, Aldred stated : 'The Labour Party is not a class party. It does not express the interests of the working class. It is the last hope of the capitalist system, the final bulwark of class-society . . . The entire outlook of the Labour Party is a capitalist outlook.' [7] In 1924 Aldred made explicit his belief that Labour's reformism, careerism and capitalist outlook were the inevitable outcome of its parliamentarism. Referring to Ramsay MacDonald, he wrote that 'High Finance has, among its political adepts, no more devoted servant than the Labour Premier of Great Britain', and explained that 'MacDonald's record . . . is the natural and consistent expression of parliamentarism. The remedy is not the passing of MacDonald, but the destruction of parliamentarism.' [8]

This outline of Guy Aldred's attitude towards the Labour Party has been drawn from sources covering a period stretching from 1906 to the mid-1950s. As this suggests,

Aldred was consistently opposed to the Labour Party throughout the period discussed in this book. The same could not be said of the Dreadnought group. As was the case with the issue of parliamentary action, the early history of the WSF was one of gradual advance towards a position already held by Aldred and his comrades.

THE WSF AND THE LABOUR PARTY

Far from being ‘categorically opposed to any form of contact with the Labour Party’ as one historian has claimed, [9] before 1920 the WSF was closely involved with the Labour Party in a variety of ways. In March 1917, for example, the WSF Executive Committee heard that Sylvia Pankhurst had attended the recent Labour Party conference as a Hackney Trades and Labour Council delegate. [10] The Dreadnought usually published detailed reports of Labour Party conference proceedings, and WSF members attended these conferences in order to distribute their newspaper. In April 1918 a WSF general meeting was informed that Sylvia Pankhurst had been elected to Poplar Trades Council and local Labour Party. In Pankhurst’s opinion ‘it was well for the WSF to be on the local Labour Party to start with’, although ‘the time might come when we could not continue in the Party’. [11] Accepting this view, the WSF Finance Committee agreed in September 1918 that the WSF should remain affiliated to Hackney Labour Party. At the same time Sylvia Pankhurst and Melvina Walker were appointed as delegates to the first Labour Party Women’s Section conference, a report of which appeared afterwards in the Dreadnought. [12] Although it was working within the Labour Party during these years, the WSF was certainly not an uncritical

supporter of everything Labour did or stood for. One of the WSF's principal disagreements concerned the Labour Party's support for the war. The target for much of this criticism was Labour MP Arthur Henderson, who had joined the Coalition government in May 1915 as President of the Board of Education, before becoming a member of the new War Cabinet in December 1916. In Sylvia Pankhurst's view Henderson had 'sacrificed the interests of Socialism and the workers for the opportunity to co-operate with the capitalist parties in carrying on the War'. [13] Although Henderson resigned from the government in August 1917, in his letter of resignation addressed to Prime Minister Lloyd George he stated : 'I continue to share your desire that the war should be carried to a successful conclusion.' [14] Henderson's membership of the War Cabinet made him a widely detested figure since it implicated him in the imprisonment of socialists and the suppression of socialist propaganda, the execution of James Connolly, the introduction of industrial conscription under the Defence of the Realm Act, and the deportation of Clydeside labour leaders. Henderson was not alone in coming in for criticism, however, as the WSF levelled its attacks against the entire Labour leadership. In April 1918, for example, the Dreadnought stated : 'We shrink from the prospect of a Labour government manned by the Labour leaders who have co-operated in the prosecution of the War and its iniquities and who have been but the echo of the capitalist politicians with whom they have associated.' [15] Likewise, during the 1918 general election campaign the WSF criticised the Labour Party for the way it had 'crawled at the heels of the capitalist Government throughout the War'. [16] The WSF's other main criticism concerned the programme and membership of the Labour Party. In

December 1917 Sylvia Pankhurst complained that the agenda for the forthcoming Labour conference was 'loaded with palliatives, without a hint of Socialism, which alone can emancipate the workers !' [17] In March 1918 she argued that Labour's programme for 'A New Social Order' was 'mainly a poor patchwork of feeble palliatives and envisages no new order, but the perpetuation of the present one . . . Nowhere in the programme is the demand for Socialism expressed'. [18] If the Labour Party's political programme did little to inspire Pankhurst's enthusiasm the new party constitution, published for discussion in October 1917, aroused her fears about the party's membership. Among the new constitution's proposals was the enrolment of individual members who had not passed through what Pankhurst called the 'narrow gate' of trade union membership, or membership of organisations such as the BSP or ILP. Pankhurst argued that 'the enrolment of individual members from the non-industrial classes . . . might prove a drag on the proletarian elements in the Party during the critical years which are ahead'. It would also attract self-seeking elements -- 'people of no settled or deep convictions may find membership of the Labour Party a convenient method of attaining to the management of people and affairs' -- while the rank and file working-class members would tend to be pushed even further into the background in the organisation and conduct of the party. [19]

The WSF put forward several proposals designed to put right the problems it had identified. When Sylvia Pankhurst attended the Labour Party conference in June 1918 she spoke in favour of Labour withdrawing from the Coalition government and ending the wartime 'political truce'. A resolution advocating the latter was passed, but Pankhurst's attempt to move an amendment

to the motion adding that Labour Party members should resign from the government was ruled out on procedural grounds. [20]

The WSF's solution to the problem of Labour's war collaborationist leadership was to elect new leaders who opposed the war. The alternative to a party under the leadership of those who had co-operated in the prosecution of the war was to 'secure International Socialist leadership in the Labour movement'. [21]

The WSF also advocated changes in the Labour Party's programme; in October 1917 Sylvia Pankhurst wrote : 'The Labour Party should set itself to draw up a strong working-class socialist programme, and should act upon it vigorously and continuously.' [22] The WSF expected this to bring four main benefits. First, an uncompromising socialist programme would deter self-seeking elements. Secondly, all the various smaller Socialist organisations and unattached members will gradually be pooled within [the Labour Party's] ranks'. [23] Thirdly, insistence on agreement with a socialist programme as a condition of membership would have the educational effect of raising the political consciousness of the 'large masses of people who are vaguely revolutionary in their tendencies and always ready to criticise those in power, but who have never mastered any economic or political theory'. [24] Fourthly, the adoption of a socialist programme would keep the party leaders under control. If the party was rebuilt 'on a clearly defined basis, uncorrupted by considerations of temporary political expediency', there would be no scope for the leadership to engage in reformist or opportunist manoeuvres. [25]

These proposals were all formulated in the context of working from within to transform the Labour Party into a genuine socialist organisation. During 1919, however,

the WSF abandoned this approach and began to advocate a regroupment of revolutionaries outside and against the Labour Party.

A major cause of the WSF's change of view was the group's perception of the role played by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), when it came to power in November 1918 in the midst of the revolutionary upheaval at the end of the war. One of the SPD's leaders, Gustave Noske, organised an alliance with the right wing paramilitary Freikorps to suppress and butcher the insurrectionary workers. In Guy Aldred's words, the SPD 'slaughtered to preserve the tottering power of Capitalism'. [26] For the WSF, the lesson of the SPD's leading part in crushing the German revolution was that 'when the social patriotic reformists come into power, they fight to stave off the workers' revolution with as strong a determination as that displayed by the capitalists'. [27]

A second important influence on the WSF's change of attitude towards the Labour Party was the formation of the Third International on the Bolsheviks' initiative in March 1919. Until the end of 1918 the WSF had hoped to see the social democratic Second International reconstituted, but when a definite attempt to revive the Second International was initiated at the beginning of 1919, Sylvia Pankhurst argued that it could no longer be considered 'a genuine International, because those who are today leading the Socialist movement -- the Russian Bolsheviks and the Spartacists of Germany -- will be absent from its councils'. [28] Subsequently the resolutions adopted by the conference in Berne in February 1919, which re-established the Second International, were criticised strongly in the Workers' Dreadnought, and the WSF Annual Conference in June

1919 instructed the WSF Executive Committee to link up with the new Third International.

This had important implications for the WSF's attitude towards the Labour Party. The invitation to the First Congress of the Communist International issued by the Bolsheviks in January 1919 had stated :

Towards the social-chauvinists, who everywhere at critical moments come out in arms against the proletarian revolution, no other attitude but unrelenting struggle is possible. As to the 'centre' -- the tactics of splitting off the revolutionary elements and unsparing criticism and exposure of the leaders. Organisational separation from the centrists is at a certain stage of development absolutely necessary. [29]

These views were reaffirmed by a resolution 'On The Berne Conference Of The Parties Of The Second International', adopted by the First Congress of the Third International in March 1919. [30] Since groups seeking to affiliate to the new International would have to adopt the same stance, the WSF's support for the Third International was obviously an important factor contributing to the group's split with the Labour Party.

The changes wrought by these factors could be seen unfolding in the WSF's internal life during 1919. In May the WSF's Bow branch was informed that three of its members (Melvina Walker, Norah Smyth and L. Watts) had been elected to Poplar Trades Council and Central Labour Party. [31] Soon afterwards the question of affiliation to Poplar Labour Party was raised at a WSF Executive Committee meeting, which accepted the view that local branches should have 'free autonomy to affiliate to Local Labour Parties'. [32] At the WSF Annual Conference in June, however, a resolution was passed instructing all branches affiliated to the Labour Party to disaffiliate. [33] The Executive Committee was

instructed to begin talks with other organisations to form a communist party in Britain, and it mandated WSF delegates to 'stand fast' on the principle of 'No Affiliation to the Labour Party'. [34] A subsequent WSF membership ballot revealed that an overwhelming majority approved the Executive Committee's instructions. [35] Yet despite these decisions nearly two months elapsed before the Executive Committee learnt of Poplar WSF's expulsion from Poplar Trades Council, Melvina Walker's removal from the Executive Committee of Poplar Labour Party, and the revocation of Walker's mandate as a delegate to the Central Labour Party and London Trades Council. [36] On 20 July 1919 Poplar WSF members had unintentionally provoked a crisis by making an unscheduled appearance at the Labour Party's meeting against Russian intervention, commandeering a trades council lorry as a platform, and haranguing the crowds on the virtues of Sovietism. The following week Norah Smyth received a curt letter from Poplar Labour Party informing her that the WSF had been expelled. [37]

The fact that Poplar WSF had been expelled from the Labour Party, rather than resign voluntarily in line with the resolutions of the 1919 Annual Conference, indicates that some WSF members may still have been in favour of involvement with the Labour Party. The WSF's federal structure, which gave considerable autonomy to local branches and individual members, easily enabled such dissenting views to be expressed. Melvina Walker, for example, was an Executive Committee member of Poplar Labour Party and the WSF, despite the latter's declared opposition to the former.

By the end of 1919, however, any lingering support for WSF involvement with the Labour Party had disappeared. The Annual Conference, the Executive

Committee and a ballot of the full membership had all come out against affiliation, and in February 1920 this first unequivocal statement of opposition to the Labour Party was published in the Dreadnought, encouraging other groups to follow the WSF's example :

We urge our Communist comrades to come out of the Labour Party and build up a strong opposition to it in order to secure the emancipation of Labour and the establishment of Communism in our time. Comrades, do not give your precious energies to building up the Labour Party which has already betrayed you, and which will shortly join the capitalists in forming a Government of the Noske type. [38]

The final event which had led the Dreadnought group to make this open and unambiguous break with the Labour Party had been the first conference of the Third International's Western European Sub-Bureau, which began in Amsterdam on 3 February 1920. A resolution on trade unions adopted by the conference stated that Labourism (the pursuit of trade union interests by parliamentary means) was 'the final bulwark of defence of Capitalism against the oncoming proletarian revolution; accordingly. a merciless struggle against Labourism is imperative'. This point of view was elaborated by a resolution on 'The Communist Party and Separation of Communists from the Social Patriotic Parties', which described 'social-patriots' (that is, 'socialists' who supported the war) as 'a most dangerous enemy of the proletarian revolution', and insisted that rigorous separation of the Communists from the Social Patriots is absolutely necessary'. [39] During the debate about this resolution the conference chairman made it clear that the resolution precluded any member party of the Third International affiliating to the British Labour Party. When a vote was taken the only delegates against

the resolution were Hodgson and Willis of the British Socialist Party; all the other delegates, including Sylvia Pankhurst and the British shop stewards' movement representative J. T. Murphy, voted in favour.

This set the final seal on the WSF's opposition to the Labour Party by appearing to lend the authority of the Third International to the WSF's position. The Dreadnought's first open statement of opposition to the Labour Party appeared immediately after the Amsterdam conference, and during a discussion about the issue of affiliation to the Labour Party at a communist unity meeting on 13 March 1920, 'Pankhurst quoted the Amsterdam resolution in support of her position.' [40]

4 TRADE UNIONS AND INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION

The basis of the anti-parliamentary communist critique of trade unionism was that trade unions organised workers within the capitalist system, as 'The Pimps Of Labour' bargaining with the capitalists over the sale of the commodity labour power [1]. The anti-parliamentarians, however, wanted to see workers organised against the capitalist system, for the abolition of wage labour. The anti-parliamentarians sought the replacement of trade unions with revolutionary organisations, whose primary function would be to overthrow the capitalist system and thereafter administer communist society. In keeping with the anti-parliamentary communists' views on how the revolution would be carried out, these organisations would be constituted in such a way as to enable the vast majority of workers to organise and lead themselves. These views help to explain the particular criticisms which the anti-parliamentarians levelled at trade unionism, and the alternative forms of organisation that they proposed.

PROBLEMS AND REMEDIES

One of the features of trade unionism criticised by the Dreadnought group was the opposition between the unions' leaders and officials and the rank and file membership. This was partly explained in material terms: Sylvia Pankhurst described full-time officials as 'respectable, moderate men in comfortable positions', [2] whose salaries, status and security of position elevated them to the 'middle class' and gave them a political

outlook different from that of shopfloor workers. Since the trade union officials' privileges depended on the continued existence of capitalism, they had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and opposing revolution: 'material interest ranges the Trade Union officials on the side of capitalism'. [3] Thus CP(BSTI) secretary Edgar Whitehead wrote: 'It cannot be too strongly impressed by Communists upon all workers that T.U. officials, both by their secure position and their enhanced salaries, serve the maintenance of capitalism much more than they serve the cause of the emancipation of the workers.' [4]

The Dreadnought group also drew attention to the officials' common contempt for their members. Sylvia Pankhurst wrote that 'the apathy of the membership produces the officials' lack of faith in the capacity of the membership, and, even apart from other causes, is a source of the cynical contempt for the rank and file which so many officials display'. [5] Yet there was nothing inevitable about the rank and file's 'apathy': it was a condition which the union officials deliberately fostered, since one of the ways in which they could maintain their own positions of power and privilege was by excluding the rank and file from participating in union affairs. The officials were assisted in this by the form of trade union organisation :

The members . . . resign all their authority, all their rights and liberties, as far as the Union is concerned, to the Union officials. This is an essential feature of Trade Unionism . . . The Parliamentary form of the trade unions, which removes the work of the Union from the members to the officials, inevitably creates an apathetic and unenlightened membership which, for good or evil, is a mere prey to the manipulation of the officials. [6]

Guy Aldred also observed the antagonism between the unions' officials and rank and file and the differences between these two groups' power. He explained this by reference to the trade unions role as permanent negotiating bodies within capitalism. Unions could not hope to bargain successfully with the bosses unless they had the disciplined backing of their entire membership. Since criticisms of the union by the rank and file, or rank and file actions which the union had not sanctioned, would undermine the leaders' position vis-à-vis the capitalists, the leaders were forced to urge caution on the members and suppress any criticisms coming from the rank and file. In short, successful bargaining required the members to relinquish all power and initiative to their leaders; the more they did this, however, the greater would be the scope for the leaders to betray the members. Thus it was the trade unions' role as bargainers and negotiators which led to the growth of oligarchic leadership and to the likelihood of the rank and file being 'sold out'. [7]

The anti-parliamentary communists also criticised the way that unions organised workers on the basis of their sectional differences (according to craft, trade and so on) rather than on the basis of what they had in common: 'instead of preserving the vaunted unity of the working class [the trade unions] prevent it by dividing the workers into watertight compartments'. [8] Since capitalism could only be overthrown by a united working class, organisations such as trade unions, which divided the working class, were obviously counterrevolutionary. Guy Aldred argued, further, that even in reformist terms 'trade unionism has accomplished nothing so far as the well-being of the entire working class is concerned', since the effectiveness of unionisation depended on excluding other workers (such as the unskilled) from its

ranks, for example through apprenticeships and the closed shop. [9] This sectional and divisive mentality also led unionised workers to spend as much time fighting each other over issues such as demarcation disputes as they spent struggling against their common enemy, the capitalists.

A final significant criticism of trade unions made by the Dreadnought group was that 'their branches are constructed according to the district in which the worker resides, not according to where he works'. [10] The point of this particular criticism was that since the unions did not organise workers where they were potentially most powerful -- that is, at the point of production -- they did not measure up to the requirements of the sort of revolutionary organisations sought by anti-parliamentarians.

During 1917-20 the Dreadnought group proposed certain measures to overcome the problems outlined above. First, reactionary or reformist trade union officials should be replaced by revolutionaries: 'The first thing you must do, if you really want to overthrow the capitalist system and to establish Communism, is to get rid of your reformist and palliative-loving leaders.' [11]

Secondly, action should be taken to 'alter the structure of the Unions so as to allow the Rank and File to have complete control'. [12] Sylvia Pankhurst sought the introduction of 'The Soviet system within the trade union movement'. [13] Instead of each section of workers being represented by full-time paid officials, all workers in each workplace would meet in general assemblies to elect and mandate delegates who could be recalled and replaced at any time. As the Dreadnought explained in 1923 :

the rank and file of a trade union cannot control its officials, cannot even watch them efficiently. The trade

union machinery does not allow of it. The workers can only control an organisation which is a workshop organisation, with, when necessary, delegates appointed for specific work, instructed, subject to recall. remaining still as fellow-workers in the shop . . . The work and power of the organisation must not pass into the hands of even such delegates : it must be an organisation operated by the workers in the shop. [14]

Thirdly, a resolution drafted by Sylvia Pankhurst for a Rank and File Convention in March 1920 proposed that 'an industrial union shall be established which shall admit all workers in the industry, regardless of sex, craft or grade'. [15] Instead of being divided among several competing trade and craft unions, all workers in each industry would belong to a single union. This was intended to promote working-class unity.

The Dreadnought's view during 1917-20 was that these changes could be effected through building a rank and file movement within the trade unions. The group's attitude at this stage was essentially one of critical support for the existing unions, rather than outright opposition and hostility. This was an approach which had been summed up most succinctly by the Clyde Workers' Committee, when it had declared at the time of its formation in 1915 that it would 'support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers, but . . . act independently immediately they misrepresent them'. [16]

THE INFLUENCE OF THE ENGINEERING SHOP STEWARDS' AND MINERS' RANK AND FILE MOVEMENTS

The Dreadnought group was influenced strongly in its attitude towards the trade unions by the shop stewards' movement which emerged in Britain during the First World War. Not long after the beginning of the war most trade unions had agreed to renounce strike action for the duration, and to accept any changes in established working practices and conditions needed to increase production. Consequently a shop stewards' movement, based mainly in engineering, arose to take over the defence of workers' basic interests. Many of the leading shop stewards belonged to organisations such as the SLP and BSP, and they regarded the shop stewards' movement as a form of organisation which would not only be able to defend workers' interests within capitalism, but which could also be used to overthrow capitalism and reorganise production on a socialist basis. The most cogent expression of the shop stewards' movement's ideas was J. T. Murphy's pamphlet *The Workers' Committee* (1917). This discussed most of the critical points which would also be raised in the Dreadnought's articles about trade unions: 'the conflict between the rank and file of the trade unions and their officials'; the unions' 'constitutional procedure' which demanded that 'the function of the rank and file shall be simply that of obedience'; the absence of any 'direct relationship between the branch group and the workshop group'; and the way in which the unions' sectionalism divided workers 'by organising them on the basis of their differences instead of their common interests'. In *The Workers' Committee* Murphy also outlined an alternative structure intended to bring about 'real democratic practice' in workers' industrial organisations, so that every member could 'participate actively in the conduct of the business of the society [union]'. Apathy towards union affairs -- 'the members do not feel a personal

interest in the branch meetings' -- would be overcome by establishing a 'direct connection between the workshop and the branch'. All power would reside at workshop level : committees elected to represent the workers would exist merely to 'render service to the rank and file' and would 'not have any governing power'. These changes would be carried out as far as possible within the existing unions : Murphy emphasised that 'we are not antagonistic to the trade union movement. We are not out to smash but to grow, to utilise every available means whereby we can achieve a more efficient organisation of the workers.' [17]

Besides the engineering shop stewards' movement, the Dreadnought group's attitude towards trade unions was also influenced by the miners' rank and file movements, particularly in South Wales where the Dreadnought group had established close links with radical workers. [18] Militants within the South Wales Miners' Federation had addressed many of the problems of trade unionism outlined above. The most widely-known expression of some of their ideas on these issues was *The Miners' Next Step*, a pamphlet published in 1912 by a small group of socialist miners calling themselves the Unofficial Reform Committee. *The Miners' Next Step* criticised the SWMF's 'conciliation policy', which 'gives the real power of the men into the hands of a few leaders'. The more power was concentrated in the hands of the officials, the less power the membership had in deciding union affairs. (This was the argument that Guy Aldred had put forward a year earlier in the first edition of his pamphlet, *Trade Unionism and the Class War*). Rank and file control of the union was far too indirect, while the 'social and economic prestige' of the leaders raised them to a position where 'they have therefore in some things an antagonism of interests with the rank and file'.

Another criticism of the union was that 'the sectional character of organisation in the mining industry renders concerted action almost impossible'.

This critique was accompanied by constructive proposals for reforming the union. The pamphlet proposed a single organisation for all mine and quarry workers in Britain, which would enable them to achieve 'a rapid and simultaneous stoppage of wheels throughout the mining industry'. Proposals for democratisation of the union were also outlined, so as to enable the rank and file to 'take supreme control of their own organisation'. All policy initiative and ratification was to rest with the lodges, and the union executive was to become an unofficial, 'purely administrative body; composed of men directly elected by the men for that purpose'. If these reforms were carried out there would be a growing recognition that 'the lodge meetings are the place where things are really done'; rank and file apathy would disappear, and the lodges would become 'centres of keen and pulsating life'. The long-term objective of these proposals was 'to build up an organisation that will ultimately take over the mining industry, and carry it on in the interests of the workers'. This aim also applied to all other industries: the authors wanted to see every industry thoroughly organised, in the first place, to fight, to gain control of, and then to administer, that industry'. [19]

The strong influence of such ideas on the Dreadnought group's attitude towards the trade unions, and in particular the insistence of militant mining and engineering workers on the need to work within the trade unions, shows that some accounts of the Dreadnought group's attitude have been factually mistaken. For example, it is not correct to suggest that 'Pankhurst's group . . . was unable to prevent the Communist Party,

formed in late 1920, from pledging to work within the existing trade union structure', [20] since the fact is that the Dreadnought group supported such a strategy. The CP(BSTI)'s programme stated that the party should aim to 'stimulate the growth of rank and file organisation' and 'undermine the influence of reactionary Trade Union leaders over the rank and file' by forming a CP(BSTI) branch within every local trade union branch and workplace. [21]

A circular to CP(BSTI) branches stated that the party's 'most urgent need' was 'the speedy addition to the ranks of the party of genuine class fighters from the ranks of the proletariat, especially of the organised industrial proletariat, so that the party may exercise increasing control and influence inside the organised Unions of Workers'. [22] A CP(BSTI) Industrial Sub-Committee submitted a report suggesting how this might be achieved. It stated : 'Branches should make the closest distinction between work through the NON PARTY MASS ORGANISATIONS OF OUR CLASS, and through the PARTY ORGANISATIONS.' CP(BSTI) members were to oppose 'Party Organisations' such as the Labour Party, but try to exert every possible influence within 'Non Party Mass Organisations' such as trade unions, shop stewards' and rank and file movements, and unemployed workers' organisations. In order to gain influence within such organisations party members were instructed to 'accept delegation from branches of their industrial organisations to all such bodies as Trade Union Congresses, Trade Union Executives, or to any Trades and Labour Council or similar body WHERE SUCH ACCEPTANCE OF DELEGATION DOES NOT NECESSITATE DENIAL OF THEIR COMMUNIST PRINCIPLES'. Wherever possible, party members were to 'take full and active part

in building up Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movements, and in all Rank and File Movements which weaken the power of officials, and lead to Rank and File Control, Mass Action, and the development of the Class Struggle'. Agitation within trade union branches was also intended to spread communist ideas, attract militant union members into the CP(BSTI), and expose the trade unions' inadequacies as revolutionary organisations. [23] All of which demonstrates the complete inaccuracy of the claim that the Dreadnought group 'despised . . . participation in the work of the trade unions'. [24]

GUY ALDRED AND THE SHOP STEWARDS' MOVEMENT

One of the several significant differences between the Dreadnought group and Guy Aldred concerned their respective attitudes towards the shop stewards' movement. Aldred was imprisoned repeatedly after the introduction of conscription in 1916, because he refused to fight in an imperialist war from which only the capitalist class would profit. His opposition to the war also led him to oppose those workers who were not only churning out the munitions which millions of workers in uniform were using to slaughter each other, but were also seeking to profit from their strategically important position by bargaining for wage rises, reductions in working hours and so on. In Aldred's view the engineering shop stewards' movement's aims contained no suggestion of not erecting capitalist institutions, of not engaging in armament work, of asserting any sort of class-consciousness against the war. Indeed, the workers' committee flourished on war . . . The idea was merely that of improving the worker's

status in the commodity struggle and not to develop his revolutionary opposition to capitalism. [25]

Aldred criticised those 'revolutionaries' who separated their industrial agitation from their opposition to the war, leaving their 'revolutionary' politics behind when they entered the munitions factory. Aldred described Willie Gallacher, for example, as someone who had 'made munitions during the war, and atoned for this conduct by delivering Socialist lectures in the dinner hour'. [26]

Aldred's attitude towards the shop stewards' movement has led one critic to dismiss him as 'a character marginal to the organised labour movement on Clydeside' because 'he condemned the munitions workers as "assassins of their own kindred" '. [27] But Aldred's attitude was shared by another figure less frequently dismissed as 'marginal' -- John Maclean too was opposed to the way the Clyde Workers' Committee and the socialists on it were behaving . . . Most of the shop stewards were socialists and anti-war, but they had submerged their politics in workshop struggles and were not even mentioning the war inside the factories . . . This meant that no anti-war fight developed inside the factories; the men were making guns, shells and all kinds of munitions, but the all-important question was never raised. [28]

David Kirkwood, the shop stewards' leader at Beardmore's Park-head Forge in Glasgow, was an outstanding example of the type of stewards criticised by Aldred and Maclean. Although he claimed to oppose the war, Kirkwood's own account of the war years scarcely mentions him engaging in any sort of anti-war activity. He was a willing collaborator in any scheme to increase munitions output, so long as it did not adversely affect wages and conditions, and relished the quips that it was really he (Kirkwood), and not the owner Sir William

Beardmore, who was actually in charge of running Parkhead Forge. [29] The attitude of stewards such as Kirkwood led John Maclean, in his famous May 1918 speech from the dock of the High Court, Edinburgh, to condemn not only worldwide capitalism -- 'the most infamous, bloody and evil system that mankind has ever witnessed' -- but also those workers who sought to exploit their powerful bargaining position in the munitions industry :

David Kirkwood . . . said that the Parkhead Forge workers were then prepared to give a greater output and accept dilution if they, the workers, had some control over the conditions under which the greater output would accrue . . . Since he has got into position he seems to have boasted that he has got a record output. The question was put to me : Was this consistent with the position and with the attitude of the working class? I said it was not . . . that his business was to get back right down to the normal, to 'ca'canny' so far as the general output was concerned. [30]

When the war ended, however, there was no longer any political reason for Aldred not to support the shop stewards' movement. In August 1919 he expressed his approval of the forms of organisation created during the war by the movement, writing of the need to abandon 'the unwieldy, bureaucratic, highly centralised Industrial Union idea of peace-time [class] war organisation' in favour of 'a living unit of organisation in every workshop, and a federation of living units, mobilising, according to necessity, the real red army. This will be accomplished by developing our Workshop Committees.' [31] Around the same time, the Communist League, in whose formation Aldred participated, was arguing that communists should 'enter the workers' committees and councils and by their agitation and education develop

and extend the growing class consciousness'. In time the workers' committees would overthrow the capitalist System and then function as the administrative machinery of communist society. [32] This was basically the same position which the CP(BSTI) put forward in more detail in 1920

THE POST-WAR CLASS STRUGGLE

So far this chapter has concentrated on the anti-parliamentary communists' ideas up to 1920. During 1920-1 these ideas began to change, mainly in response to fluctuations in the pattern of the post-war class struggle. In Britain the shop stewards', workers' committee and rank and file movements were largely the product of certain groups of workers' militancy during the war and the short post-war boom. If the level of class struggle declined these forms of organisation were likely to disappear, along with the revolutionary expectations vested in them. This is precisely what did happen in Britain after 1920.

The high level of wartime demand for their products kept unemployment among engineering, shipbuilding and metal union workers below 1 per cent during 1915-18. [33] During the short-lived post-armistice boom (1919-20), the unemployment rate among these workers was still only 3.2 per cent. In 1921, however, unemployment shot up to 22.1 per cent, and then to 27 per cent the following year. At the same time the wage gains which engineering workers had made during the war began to be eroded. This was the background to a decline in engineering workers' militancy, reflected in the downwards trend in the statistics for strikes in the metal, engineering and shipbuilding industries (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Disputes involving stoppages in the metal, engineering and shipbuilding industries. 1919-24

	Working days 'lost'	Workers involved
1919	12,248,000	403,000
1920	3,402,000	179,000
1921	4,420,000	63,000
1922	17,484,000	369,000
1923	5,995,000	61,000
1924	1,400,000	71,000

Source: Board of Trade Statistical Department, 1926.

The exceptional figures for 1922 were the result of a three-month engineering workers' lock-out; Harry McShane describes what happened :

the engineers were defeated . . . and they returned to much worse working conditions. The union's defeat meant a reduction in wages, not only for them but ultimately for all trades and labourers as well. After the war I got £4 8s. a week as an engineer, but after the lock-out engineers' wages went down to £2 13s. [34]

This was the general pattern throughout the rest of British industry. Unemployment increased from 1.5 per cent in the autumn of 1920 to 18 per cent by December 1921. Cuts in wages were only partially offset by a fall in the cost of living. The number of working days 'lost' in disputes involving stoppages in all industries decreased, as did the number of workers involved (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Disputes involving stoppages (all industries), 1919~24

	Working days 'lost'	Workers involved
--	---------------------	------------------

1919	34,969,000	2,591,000
1920	26,568,000	1,932,000
1921	85,872,000	1,801,000
1922	19,850,000	552,000
1923	10,672,000	405,000
1924	8,424,000	613,000

Source: Board of Trade Statistical Department, 1926.

The sections of the working class which had been at the forefront of the class struggle were the ones hit hardest by the onset of the post-war depression. The national rate of unemployment in August 1922 stood at 12.8 per cent - compared with 27 per cent on Clydeside and 32 per cent in Sheffield. Engineering and shipbuilding workers accounted for 65 per cent of all unemployed workers on Clydeside, while iron, steel and engineering workers made up 70 per cent of the total in Sheffield. In Wales as a whole 44 per cent of unemployed workers were miners -- a percentage which was obviously much higher in the coalmining areas themselves. [35] In his Presidential address to the South Wales Miners' Federation in July 1923, Vernon Hartshorn remarked that 'he had never known a period when the workmen had been more demoralised than they were during 1922 . . . Wages had been low, unemployment had been extensive and the owners had taken advantage of the general position to attack standard wages and customs which had been in existence for many years'. [36]

During this period the generalised class struggle of the years before 1920 gave way to defensive battles in which sections of the working class were isolated and defeated one by one. The year 1921 illustrates the change. In April the railway and transport workers' union leaders withdrew their promise of support to the miners, leaving their Triple Alliance partners to fight a three-month

struggle which ended in defeat. Of the 85 million working days 'lost' in 1921, nearly 80 million were accounted for by locked-out miners. In 1921 almost two and a half times more days were 'lost' in strikes as there had been in 1919, but more than a third fewer workers were involved (see Table 4.2).

These circumstances saw a rapid decline in the rank and file activity of the shop stewards' movement. As unemployment rose known militants were frequently the first to lose their jobs through victimisation by employers: 'Soon it was a wry joke that the shop steward leaders of 1918 had become the unemployed leaders of the 1920s'. [37] The decline of rank and file activity saw power within the trade unions shift back in favour of the full-time officials, a trend consolidated by a number of major union amalgamations (which on grounds of sheer size created conditions for greater bureaucratisation) and by the spread of national collective bargaining. As Sylvia Pankhurst observed in 1922 :

Undoubtedly a strong move is being made by the Union officials to secure greater power in the Unions and to thrust the rank and file still further into the background . . . the Unions become more and more bureaucratic, more and more dominated by the capitalist influence upon the Trade Union leaders, still further removed from rank and file control. [38]

The victimisation of shopfloor activists during the 'employers' offensive' was complemented by state repression of 'subversives' : 'In 1921 over 100 "communists" were arrested and jailed for variations on the theme of sedition.' [39] A leaflet issued by the APCF in 1921, in connection with the prosecution of the Glasgow Communist Group for publishing the 'seditious' Red Commune, referred to the 'concerted effort on the part of the ruling class . . . to suppress ruthlessly every

serious advocate of social transformation in order to preserve the present iniquitous and unjust system'. [40]

PART II CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

5 THE LATE TWENTIES AND EARLY THIRTIES

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE WORKERS' DREADNOUGHT

After the issue dated 14 June 1924, the Workers' Dreadnought ceased to appear. For several years this weekly newspaper had kept its readers in touch with worldwide political developments and had published the views of the most radical international communist groups. In July 1921, after Sylvia Pankhurst had been censured by the CPGB for publicly criticising the conduct of party members belonging to the Poplar Board of Guardians, she defended her actions by arguing that only by criticism and discussion can a knowledge and understanding of Communist tactics be hammered out by the Communist Party and communicated to the masses'.¹ It was in this same spirit that after Pankhurst's expulsion from the CPGB the Dreadnought continued to publish information, analyses and debates about which most workers would have remained unaware had they relied on the pro-Comintern publications for enlightenment. At the same time the Dreadnought group's political views were thoroughly radicalised by the impact of the political events that it reported, and by its contacts with revolutionary groups in other countries. In short, during the period of its greatest intellectual vitality and creativity the Dreadnought group was alive to, and sustained by the controversies of the international communist movement and an unprecedentedly high level of class struggle. The disappearance of the Workers' Dreadnought was, therefore, both a sign and a

consequence of the ebbing of the great wave of radical actions and ideas which swept over most of Europe after the 1917 Russian revolution.

By 1921 most revolutionaries had reluctantly begun to acknowledge that their confident expectations of widespread revolutions, fuelled by 1917 and its aftermath, were not going to be fulfilled in the immediate future after all. When the Glasgow Communist Group brought out the first (and only) issue of the Red Commune in February 1921, for example, it remarked: 'Some will think that we could not have chosen a more inopportune moment . . . Unemployment is spreading throughout the country. Misery, sorrow, poverty, inability to sustain the propaganda exists everywhere. The Communist movement is divided into factions and fractions.'² During the same month the Workers' Dreadnought made a similarly pessimistic assessment of the situation when it warned that 'it would be folly to pretend that the hour is fully revolutionary'.³ Nor were the British anti-parliamentarians' comrades abroad any more sanguine. In the summer of 1922 the Russian anti-parliamentarians expressed the view that 'the situation of the Proletariat throughout the world is at present an extremely difficult one',⁴ while the KAPD at its Fifth Special Conference also concluded that 'the revolution for the time being is at a standstill'.⁵

The fading prospects of revolution naturally caused a steady haemorrhage of members from the anti-parliamentary communist groups in Britain. In the first six months of its existence (that is, between June and December 1920) the CB(BSTI) had attracted a membership of around 600, organised in more than 30 separate branches, two-thirds of them located outside London. When the Dreadnought group tried to set up the Communist Workers' Party in February 1922, however,

it managed to established only three branches outside London, in Sheffield, Plymouth and Portsmouth. This illustrates the drastic loss of support suffered by the Dreadnought group in the space of less than two years. The anti-parliamentarians aligned with Guy Aldred and the Spur were similarly few in number. When the Glasgow Communist Group's headquarters were raided following the publication of the 'seditious' Red Commune in February 1921, the police 'took possession of 51 membership cards, some bearing the name of Glasgow Anarchist Group and some Glasgow Communist Group' (the two groups had united at the end of 1916).⁶ This figure ties in with John McGovern's recollection that in 1921 'a number of us in Shettleston formed a branch of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation . . . We started off with between fifty and sixty members'.⁷ From the outset the APCF's strength lay where it would always reside: in Glasgow and the surrounding areas. However, it would not be unreasonable to reckon that the APCF, like the Dreadnought group, also suffered a steady loss of membership after the start of the 1920s. When the Workers' Dreadnought ceased to appear after mid-1924, therefore, it was because Sylvia Pankhurst and her comrades had finally succumbed to the intense pressures imposed by trying to sustain communist propaganda during a period in which their efforts were receiving practically no encouragement in the form of support from the working class.

SYLVIA PANKHURST'S SUBSEQUENT EVOLUTION

Two historians of the German left communist movement, Authier and Barrot, offer this assessment of Sylvia Pankhurst:

In her period as a communist, she always based herself on experience. Her radical positions were not based on intellectual reasoning nor on reference to the traditions of the movement, but always relied on her own personal experiences. Her evolution is interesting insofar as it was not at all an intellectual development. She approached communism under the pressure of events and abandoned it when it declined as a practical movement.⁸

Raymond Challinor expresses a similar opinion: Pankhurst 'was never a theoretician, with a firm grasp of Marxism; her significance came from a tremendous courage and dedication, a total commitment to the struggle of working people'.⁹ The implication of these observations is that if the struggle of working people declined then Pankhurst's activities would focus on other issues; or that if working-class struggle became less radical, so too would Pankhurst's political views.

This proposition is borne out by the nature of Pankhurst's activities after 1924, when her publications covered subjects as diverse as national independence for India,¹⁰ the adoption of 'Interlingua' as a common world language to promote international understanding and friendship,¹¹ translations of the work of the Rumanian nationalist poet Mihail Eminescu,¹² and (with the approval of, among others, her one-time enemy Arthur Henderson) a proposal for a universal free maternity service.¹³

After writing historical accounts of The Suffragette Movement (1931) and of her activities on The Home Front in London's East End during the First World War (1932), opposition to fascism became Pankhurst's main political concern. Following the Italian invasion and

conquest of Abyssinia in 1935—6, she began publication of a newspaper called the New Times and Ethiopia News to champion the Abyssinian cause, and during the Second World War she gave her wholehearted support to the Allies' fight against the Axis powers. Pankhurst's support for the Second World War is evidence of the unbridgeable gulf which by then had separated her both from her own revolutionary past and from the remaining anti-parliamentary communists, who, as we will see in Chapter 8, remained prepared to suffer imprisonment for opposing capitalist war.

CONDITION OF THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS, 1925-35

The disappearance of the Dreadnought left the APCF as the sole surviving anti-parliamentary communist organisation in Britain. This chapter is mainly concerned with the APCF's continued propagation and occasional elaboration of the basic elements of antiparlamentarism developed in the earlier period. To begin with, however, it would be useful to outline the circumstances in which the APCF was active during the years 1925—35.

Several of the trends which had emerged during 1920—1 continued.¹⁴ Wage rates and the cost of living both fell slowly but steadily until the end of 1933, when they gradually began to rise again. This meant that on average living standards rose for those in full-time employment — but this is a crucial qualification, since short-time working was widespread and unemployment rates were high: 10.4 per cent of insured workers were unemployed in 1929, 16.1 per cent in 1930, 21.3 per cent in 1931, and 22.1 per cent in 1932.

The debacle of the May 1926 General Strike, and the defeat of the miners' strike in support of which it had been called, had an immediate effect on industrial militancy. In 1927 there were only 308 stoppages of work in all industries (302 in 1928), involving 108 000 workers (124 000 in 1928) with 1.7 million days 'lost' (1.38 million in 1928).

Briefly, this was a period characterised by advantage being taken of the weakened state of 'organised labour' (there was a steady fall in trade union membership), with the introduction of the Trades Disputes Act and the principle of contracting-in for the trade union political levy in 1927; a growth in 'class-collaborationist' ideas, with the 1928 Mond-Turner talks between members of the TUC General Council and leading employers about 'industrial peace', the growth of company unionism in the mining industry, and a right-wing attack on the CPGB-dominated National Minority Movement within trade unions and trades councils; and a turn away from industrial to political action, culminating in the return of a second minority Labour government in 1929.

The world capitalist crisis (1929—33), which covers most of the second half of the period under consideration here, saw a revival of industrial militancy relative to the level to which it had fallen after the General Strike, but this recovery came nowhere near to regaining the levels of the pre-1921 period, and it would be hard to over-emphasise the differences in circumstances between these two periods.

Of these changed circumstances two in particular should be stressed. One concerns the international context. By the end of the 1920s a generation of militant workers had been physically defeated and ideologically disarmed. In Russia the working class faced a dictatorial regime masquerading under the guise of communism, plus

increasingly ruthless exploitation to meet the demands of rapid capital accumulation. In Germany revolutionary workers had been crushed by social democracy and now faced the rising threat of Nazism. In Italy Mussolini's fascists had been in power since 1922; the capitalists had extracted their revenge for the *biennio rosso* ('two red years') of 1919—20. Inspiration from abroad, which — in the form of the Russian revolution — had been so important to the development of the post-war revolutionary movement in Britain, was largely absent in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This was reflected in the anti-parliamentarians' publications. International news and translations of the texts of groups in other countries had been a vital feature of the Workers' Dreadnought; by comparison there was a dearth of such material in the APCF's *Commune*. The anti-parliamentary movement's political views became increasingly influenced not by major world-historical events as had been the case in the earlier period, but by essentially local issues such as the Glasgow Green 'free speech fight' in the early 1930s (see Chapter 6). Not until the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain in 1936 did the movement in Britain regain something of its former vitality.

The second difference in circumstances concerns changes in the composition and fortunes of the working class in Britain. In this respect the years 1925—35 were typical of a much longer period in that they saw a steady decline in the numbers employed in 'traditional' working-class occupations (such as mining, engineering and shipbuilding) and a rise in the number of workers employed in service industries and 'white-collar' office jobs (such as distributive trades, commerce, banking, insurance and finance, and local government service). At the same time, industries such as mining, engineering and shipbuilding experienced rates of unemployment

which were for the most part far above the national average.

Table 5.1 Percentage of workers unemployed (yearly mean), 1925—35

	All workers		Coalminers	Engineers
	Shipbuilders			
1925	11.3	11.5	13.3	33.5
1926	12.5	9.5	15.1	39.5
1927	9.7	19.0	11.8	29.7
1928	10.8	23.6	9.8	24.5
1929	10.4	19.0	9.9	25.3
1930	16.1	20.6	14.2	27.6
1931	21.3	28.4	27.0	51.9
1932	22.1	34.5	29.1	62.0
1933	19.9	33.5	27.4	61.7
1934	16.7	29.7	18.4	51.2
1935	15.5	27.2	13.6	44.4

Source: Department of Employment and Productivity, 1971.

Thus previously militant sections of the working class, and the geographical areas in which they had been concentrated, became centres of high unemployment, dire poverty and demoralisation.

RUSSIAN STATE CAPITALISM, THE COMINTERN AND TROTSKY

During 1925—35 the anti-parliamentary communists appear to have had three main theoretical preoccupations: an analysis of the state and economy established in Russia after 1917, opposition to parliamentary action and opposition to the Labour Party

and trade unionism. We will now examine the APCF's treatment of each of these issues, beginning with Russia. During 1925 Guy Aldred's bitter quarrel with Emma Goldman and Freedom over the anarchists' criticisms of the Bolshevik regime continued, with Aldred still defending the Bolsheviks. In May 1925, for example, the APCF stated: 'we take our stand by the Soviet Union', and called on the Third International to abandon its opposition to left communism ('a grave error of judgement') so that 'unity of association' between the APCF and the Comintern could be re-established. 15

In November 1925, however, on the occasion of the eighth anniversary of the Russian revolution, the APCF suddenly announced a profound change of view. It denounced the commemoration of the anniversary as a celebration of 'counter-revolution', in which the APCF would not be participating. Instead, it would be thinking of 'our persecuted comrades in Russia' and 'our comrades rotting in Soviet prisons. 16 The reasons behind this bolt from the blue were never explained at the time, but a clue can be found in a pamphlet written by Guy Aldred 20 years later. Recalling that during his quarrel with Goldman and Freedom he had been 'unwilling to believe the allegations of despotism and imprisonments of revolutionists', Aldred admitted that, in retrospect, 'this scepticism was most unjust to the imprisoned and persecuted comrades in Soviet Russia. 17 In the same passage he referred to a book published in America in 1925 by the International Committee for Political Prisoners. This had been reviewed in Freedom after its publication in England in 1926. Endorsed by a score of well-known intellectual sympathisers and fellow-travellers of the Russian regime, it brought to light detailed documentation of the persecution and imprisonment of hundreds of revolutionaries by the

Bolsheviks during 1923—4 alone.¹⁸ Thus the most likely explanation for the APCF's change of view would appear to be that the amount of trustworthy evidence which had accumulated in corroboration of the anarchists' claims had finally become too great for the anti-parliamentarians to ignore or dispute.

With a zeal typical of converts to a new-found point of view the APCF began to publicise the plight of persecuted revolutionaries in Russia, giving particular attention to the case of Workers' Group member Gabriel Miasnikov, whose cause had first been championed by the Workers' Dreadnought in December 1923.¹⁹

The first signs of the APCF's adoption of the Dreadnought's view that capitalism existed in Russia also began to appear. In the November 1925 Commune the Communist Party of Great Britain was said to stand not for 'the emancipation of the proletariat either in Russia or in Britain, but for bureaucracy, capitalism and militarism. The CPGB's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat really meant 'the rise to authority of a new ruling class, and not the end of class society'. The APCF's conclusion was that 'not Communism, not Socialism, but capitalism and militarism, exactly as in Britain, now exists in Russia'.²⁰ The same point of view was repeated two months later. Warning the working class that 'The Communist Party . . . has nothing in common with Communism or the working-class struggle', the Commune predicted that before long the 'Moscow Janus' would be 'dismissed with scorn and loathing from its place of proletarian honour by the enraged and enlightened workers of the world'.²¹

The APCF's explanations of how capitalism had emerged from a revolution originally hailed as the inauguration of communism echoed the Fourth International's analysis of 1917 as a dual revolution —

part proletarian-communist, part peasant—bourgeois — in which peasant interests had eventually triumphed. In 1926 the Commune argued:

Lenin sought to found the Communist order not on the interests of the industrial proletariat, but on an attempted combination of these interests with those of the peasants. This policy gave birth to the question how far, politically and economically, one could meet the demands of the peasants without deviating from the real aim of Socialism or Communism, without estranging the workers, the real power of Sovietism. The Anti-Parliamentary answer is that the interests of the peasants cannot be reconciled with those of the industrial proletariat.²²

References in the APCF's press to the Bolsheviks' 'abandonment of Communism in 1921' ²³(the date that the NEP was introduced) followed on from this analysis. In 1934 the first part of a revised edition of Aldred's 1920 pamphlet on Bakunin was published by comrades of Aldred in France. In this work Aldred referred to 'the counter-revolutionary fallacy that an agrarian country can build a socialist state surrounded by capitalist nations', ²⁴ thus echoing two explanations previously put forward by the Dreadnought: that the material preconditions for socialism in terms of the development of the productive forces had been absent in Russia ('an agrarian country'), and that the Bolsheviks had been forced to compromise with capitalism because of the absence of successful working-class uprisings elsewhere in the world.

Further light on Aldred's explanation of the 'reversion to capitalism' in Russia was shed by one of the crucial differences between the original and revised texts. In the 1920 version Aldred had argued forcefully in favour of the need for working-class dictatorship during the post-

revolutionary transitional period. In the 1934 version, however, Aldred added a significant caveat: the workers' dictatorship had to be 'the living power of action of life in revolt; not the dead power of decrees and a new state authority'. In Russia this living power of action of life in revolt — in other words the working class's autonomous activity — had been overpowered and defeated by the Bolsheviks, and 'a dictatorship established on the basis of the worker's surrender to an external central bureaucracy'.²⁵ The Bolshevik-controlled state, rather than the Russian workers themselves, had established its own direction and dictatorship over all economic, political and social activity.

As a corollary of this point of view the APCF developed an analysis of Russia as a state-directed capitalist economy. In 1928 it was pointed out in the Commune that 'The State of Labourers and Farmers, the Workers' and Peasants' Republic, owns the means of production in opposition to the workers themselves'. Thus socialism did not exist in Russia, since the fundamental categories of capitalism had not been superseded: 'The Soviet state-labourer remains a wage-labourer. Industry brought to the State is based on surplus value robbery, the extortion of labour-energy, and liquidation of industrial power. The State Communist Party of Russia has destroyed Sovietism and prepared the way for private capitalistic production.'²⁶

The APCF also reassessed its view of the Third International. In 1927 the Commune published a leaflet written by the Group of International Communists (GIC) in Holland about a recent agreement between the German and Russian governments, under which Germany was allowed to manufacture aeroplanes, munitions and poison gas on Russian territory. Observing that the German Communist Party's

Reichstag deputies had supported the agreement, the Dutch group's leaflet concluded: 'The Third International is only a weapon in the hands of the new Russian capitalist class . . . under the mask of Communism, the interests of RUSSIAN CAPITALISM are being advanced and protected.' The Commune commented: 'We endorse every word of this manifesto of our Dutch Anti-Parliamentarian comrades. The Third International represents the counter-Revolution, and the Moscow "Communists" stand for anti-Socialism, pure and simple.'²⁷

Thus the APCF had adopted a critique of Russia and the Third International closely resembling that pioneered by the Dreadnought group. Both saw the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921 as the decisive turning-point in the fortunes of the revolution, after which Russia had become a state capitalist regime. Both explained the failure to establish communism in Russia by reference to the same basic factors: the insufficient development of the productive forces; the predominance of a peasant class intent on acquiring petit-bourgeois property rights; the inability of the working class to establish its own control over all aspects of the economy, politics and society; the self-seeking ambitions of the Bolshevik party, which had acted in opposition to the working class; and the fatal isolation of the revolution within Russia's boundaries. Finally, both groups came to regard the Third International as the tool of the Russian capitalist state's counter-revolutionary foreign policy.

Despite criticising the Comintern in such terms the APCF's federalist inclinations in organisational matters, along with the international decline of the revolutionary movement, caused the group to take no part in trying to build a new International. The Commune talked of 'the relative non-importance and non-usefulness of

International Congresses'; it supported the idea of forming a new International 'for propaganda purposes . . . but not as a practical organisation of action, issuing decrees, and passing binding resolutions'.²⁸ In 1927 some of the surviving left communist groups in Germany and Holland made renewed contact with the APCF and tried to forge closer links, but to no avail. In 1933 the secretary of the Fourth (Communist Workers') International complained that 'the British groups have not made any effort to come into closer contact with the comrades here. Although I fully agree that things should not be precipitated, I don't see why international linking should be neglected so obstinately as your groups do.'²⁹ This section on Russia can be concluded with some remarks about the APCF's attitude towards Trotsky. When the Trotskyist Left Opposition within the Bolshevik party first came to its attention, the APCF described it as a 'worthless sham', since Trotsky had no intention of forming a new organisation to oppose the 'Stalin party of Thermidor', and also because Trotsky had declared his ultimate loyalty to Russia as the 'proletarian fatherland':

This Trotsky Opposition stands, therefore, on the same platform as Stalin, the delivery of shells to the German bourgeoisie, the forming of blocks with the bourgeois States, and the forcing of the toilers of those States to fight with and under the banner of their bourgeoisie, at the instruction of the Third International and the request of the Soviet Union.³⁰

Trotsky's opposition to Stalin was regarded as a power struggle within the ruling class of a capitalist state, while the Trotskyist Opposition's persecution by a state apparatus it had helped to create evoked irony rather than sympathy. The Trotskyists were being hoist by their own petard.³¹

Nevertheless, when Trotsky was eventually exiled from Russia and forced to move from country to country to avoid offending reluctant hosts or being silenced for ever by Stalin's hired assassins, Guy Aldred stated his support for Trotsky's right to engage in political agitation wherever he chose, and for his right to return to Russia by virtue of his heroic role in the revolution.³² Some anti-parliamentarians also helped to distribute *Militant*, the newspaper of the Trotskyist Left Opposition in the USA,³³ and in the 1930s there were occasional moves towards co-operation between the anti-parliamentarians and Trotskyist groups in Britain and America. More often than not, however, such contacts were based on a misunderstanding of Trotsky's views. In 1932, for example, Aldred wrote that the APCF agreed with Trotsky's analysis of Russia, which as they understood it was that 'Socialism does not exist in Russia, and cannot exist there because of the peasant problem within the USSR, and the dictates of the surrounding capitalist nations, with whom the Soviet Union has to trade.'³⁴ The APCF inferred from this that Trotsky regarded Russia as state capitalist. Yet in *The Revolution Betrayed*, written in 1936, Trotsky stated: 'The attempt to represent the Soviet bureaucracy as a class of "state capitalists" will obviously not withstand criticism.' In his view, 'the nature of the Soviet Union as a proletarian state' remained 'basically defined' by 'the nationalisation of the land, the means of industrial production. transport and exchange, together with the monopoly of foreign trade'.³⁵ Despite what they may have thought, therefore, the anti-parliamentary communists' view of Russia was completely different from Trotsky's.

THE CASE AGAINST PARLIAMENTARISM

Whilst it was falling into line with the critique of Russia formulated earlier by the Dreadnought group, the APCF carried on with the task of propagating the basic principles of anti-parliamentary communism that have been discussed in Part I.

The case against parliamentary action continued to be argued along the lines sketched out previously. According to the APCF, Parliament, as an integral part of the capitalist state, served no interests except those of the ruling class. Its 'only function' was to conserve the private appropriation by the few of the wealth produced by the many . . . No government can sit and talk at Westminster except it serve the interests of its master, High Finance' .36 This capitalist institution could not serve the cause of working-class self-emancipation. As Guy Aldred argued in 1926: 'Parliamentarism . . . can never secure to the wealth-producers the ownership by themselves of the means of production and distribution. Access to the means of life proceeds from direct action. A class-conscious proletariat will emancipate itself by spontaneous action.'37 During the course of its 'spontaneous' revolutionary actions the working class would have to uproot and destroy all the existing institutions of the capitalist state — such as Parliament — and create new institutions — the councils or soviets — to express its own authority over the rest of society.

The APCF also continued to warn of the reformist, careerist and opportunist snares which would inevitably entrap anyone who participated in parliamentary politics. 'The parliamentary runner seeks not to emancipate the workers but to elevate himself', stated the Commune,38

while Guy Aldred likewise argued: 'A parliamentarian has no principles, and but one purpose: to oust from fame and office another parliamentarian, and so attain place and distinction.'³⁹

Parliamentarism was also rejected as a diversion from the essential tasks of the working class and its revolutionary minorities. This particular argument was summed up most succinctly by a Commune statement: 'A Socialist Proletariat is more important than a Labour House of Commons.'⁴⁰ Parliamentarism engaged the working class in 'the impossible task of discovering honest representatives to play at capitalist legislation, instead of addressing itself to the Socialist education of the masses'.⁴¹

The view that socialist education and propaganda was a vital precondition of social change revealed the essential difference between parliamentarism and anti-parliamentarism. 'Parliamentarism' was a synonym for any sort of political activity that 'makes the task dependent on the ability of leaders'; 'anti-parliamentarism' encompassed all political activity which 'makes the struggle the task of the workers themselves'.⁴² Parliamentarism 'empties the proletariat of all power, all authority, all initiative'⁴³ and so had to be opposed, since the working class needed all the power, authority and initiative it could muster if it was to achieve its own liberation. This self emancipatory aspect of working-class revolution was constantly stressed in the APCF's writings, for example by Guy Aldred in his 1929 pamphlet *At Grips With War*: 'No parliamentary discussion can end war. Only the direct thought and action of the common people can stop war . . . The one hope of world peace is the direct social and individual self-emancipation of the working class from the thralldom, economic and therefore mental and moral of

class society.’⁴⁴ In 1928 Aldred criticised the Socialist Party of Great Britain’s view that the working class could use the parliamentary apparatus of the capitalist state for revolutionary purposes, and its apparent reduction of the working class’s role in the revolution to the passive act of marking a ballot paper. Aldred reasserted his view: ‘The only way to secure the emancipation of the workers is for the workers to take control of the machinery of production and distribution, the economic organisation of life.’⁴⁵ This would not be achieved if the working class relied on leaving everything to the few individuals who stood for or were elected to Parliament. The great mass of the working class had to actively take matters into its own hands where the source of its greatest potential power lay — on the economic field.

To a large extent this view dictated where the most effective arena for revolutionary activity was thought to lie; hence another of the APCF’s reasons for rejecting participation in elections and Parliament: ‘It withdraws to the parliamentary arena men and women who should be working and agitating directly amongst the workers on the field of production, spreading the gospel at the street corners, in the lecture-hall, and wherever the workers assemble to consider and discuss.’⁴⁶

THE LABOUR PARTY, NATIONALISATION AND TRADE UNIONISM

In the APCF’s view the counter-revolutionary consequences of parliamentarism were perpetuated by all parties which participated in parliamentary politics: ‘Whatever party persuades the workers to accept the political machinery of capitalism deprives the workers of

their consciousness of revolutionary political power on the industrial field, and so betrays the interests of the workers.’⁴⁷ This was one of the angles from which the APCF attacked the Labour Party during this period, just as the anti-parliamentarians had done in earlier years.

A new development in the anti-parliamentary attack on the Labour Party was the formulation of a detailed critique of the 1924 Labour government. In the October 1926 Commune the APCF published its first full-length assessment of Ramsay MacDonald’s administration, indicting its record under such headings as Reparations, Disarmament, Empire Administration, Nationalisation of Industry, Unemployment Relief, Housing and Education. This article was also published in pamphlet form in 1926 and 1928 — the latter edition including an added passage on Military Strike Breaking.

The thrust of the APCF’s argument was that the Labour government had ‘functioned no differently from any other Capitalist Government’⁴⁸ and that ‘Labour Parliamentarism does not menace, but on the contrary serves to preserve, the business interests of capitalist society’.⁴⁹ In its remarks on Military Strike Breaking, for example, the APCF alleged that ‘the MacDonald Government rejoiced in recruiting cannon-fodder and strike-breaking military material, under the specious pretence of patriotic efficiency, in order to prove that Labour could govern capitalist society in capitalism’s interests’.⁵⁰

The Labour government’s basically capitalist nature was also brought out in the APCF’s comments on Nationalisation of Industry:

Government ownership, or nationalisation of industry, is not Socialism. Capitalist necessity may dictate the transfer of industries to state ownership and of certain services to municipal ownership. It remains joint-stock

administration just the same. Anti-Socialists have nationalised railways and coalmines without benefiting the workers. Strikes have been ruthlessly repressed, under Briand, on the State Railways of France. The same thing has occurred on the State Railways of Canada. Sweated conditions exist in the Post Office and the Mint. Municipal employees have been victimised. There is nothing radical, nothing essentially Labour, nothing fundamentally serviceable to the workers, in municipalisation and nationalisation. Socialisation, involving complete change of industrial administration, and a Labour Democracy only, is the only solution of the poverty problem. But the Labour Party, confusing the workers' mind with the parody of nationalisation for socialisation, stood for nationalisation. 51

The APCF's attack on the equation of nationalisation with socialism represented one of its strengths in comparison with the Dreadnought group. During 1914—18 the demands of organising and sustaining the economy on a war footing had forced the British state into exercising direct control over many sectors of the economy. Some revolutionaries saw state intervention of this sort as leading towards a state capitalism more thoroughly repressive than private capitalism. In October 1917, for example, Sylvia Pankhurst wrote that

Under the pre-war system of nationalisation, which we see in such departments as the Post Office, the workers are scarcely better off on the whole, and in some respects even worse off, than in private employment. The system of State control of munitions factories, railways and mines which has grown up during the War, has preserved capitalism and the capitalist, whilst rendering still more rigorous the conditions under which the workers are employed.⁵²

However, the Dreadnought's opposition to pre-war and wartime nationalisation represented only one aspect of its attitude towards nationalisation. In March 1917 Sylvia Pankhurst criticised government intervention as 'not State Socialism, but state-aided capitalism'⁵³ While Pankhurst opposed 'state-aided capitalism' — meaning industries being taken over and run by a capitalist government — she was in favour of 'State socialism' — that is, industries being taken over and run by a 'socialist' government. This distinction enabled Pankhurst to describe as 'both just and practical' the demand 'that industry shall be nationalised, and that all workers in it shall combine in its management',⁵⁴ and she herself put forward detailed proposals for the implementation of this demand. In May 1917, for example, Pankhurst outlined a 'scheme of nationalisation extending from the farmer and the importer to the consumer' under which the government would buy, produce, ration and distribute food for the nation's population as a way of overcoming wartime food shortages.⁵⁵ These proposals were shortly afterwards adopted by the WSF at its 1917 Annual Conference.⁵⁶ When workers in industries such as mining and the railways put forward demands for nationalisation at the end of the First World War, one aspect of the Dreadnought's response was its argument that 'nationalisation of the mines, so long as the capitalist system exists, will not end the exploitation of the mine-workers'.⁵⁷ This was similar to what Guy Aldred and his comrades were arguing at that time: 'To nationalise the mines would be to give them to the State: but the State represents the non-producing class: therefore the miners have nothing to gain from the nationalisation of the mines.'⁵⁸

The Dreadnought also argued, however, that ‘unless the workers are strong enough to control the Government, the capitalists who are behind the Government will never allow the workers to maintain control of the mines’.⁵⁹ In view of the group’s previous support for ‘State socialism’, this statement can be interpreted as implying a distinction between nationalisation carried out by a state controlled by private capitalists and nationalisation carried out by a workers’ government’. Thus when Sylvia Pankhurst reviewed a South Wales Socialist Society pamphlet titled *Industrial Democracy for Miners: A Plea for the Democratic Control of the Mining Industry*, she agreed with the authors’ argument that nationalisation under the control of a Minister responsible to Parliament would involve only a ‘minute’ change from being exploited by the existing mine owners, and approved of the pamphlet’s proposals for nationalisation under the administration of the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain.⁶⁰ Pankhurst also put forward proposals for nationalising the railways, which included equal wages for all rail workers, no share dividends, a pension equal to a wage for those unable to work, and control of the railways by the railway workers.⁶¹

It was the Dreadnought’s analysis of Russia as a state capitalist regime which eventually forced the group to recognise that widespread state ownership, even by a so-called ‘workers’ government’, would not change the basically capitalist nature of the economy after all. In August 1923, for example, Sylvia Pankhurst argued that ‘State Socialism, with its wages and salaries, its money system, banks and bureaucracy, is not really Socialism at all, but State Capitalism’.⁶² At the same time, the Dreadnought group also sustained its opposition to

ownership by capitalist governments. In January 1923 Pankhurst's view of state-owned enterprises was that The bulk of the work is done by hired servants whose status, in essentials, does not differ from those employed in Capitalist enterprises. They have no stake in the concern, no security of tenure, no voice in the management, no power to choose their work or the persons who are appointed to direct it.

It is not thus that the socialised industries will be administered when Capitalism disappears.⁶³

Yet even despite such statements the Dreadnought group's attitude remained inconsistent. As we saw in Chapter 3, for example, in January 1924 the Dreadnought demanded that the Labour government should nationalise the railways. Thus the APCF's unambiguous opposition to nationalisation in the period after the disappearance of the Dreadnought group represented an important advance in the clarity and consistency of the anti-parliamentarians' attitude towards an issue which remains to this day a source of widespread confusion.

Besides criticising the Labour Party's capitalist policies — such as nationalisation — the APCF also continued its well-documented attacks on prominent Labour individuals. In August 1925, for example, a 'Special "Empire Socialism" Exposure Issue' of the Commune was devoted to attacking J. H. Thomas, Secretary of State for the Colonies in the 1924 Labour government. A month later the APCF poured scorn on proposals to commemorate the sixty-fifth birthday of the old dockers' union leader Ben Tillett, a notorious jingoist who had touted war-recruitment speeches around music halls during the First World War. The mere fact that people were actually planning to honour 'this lying knave whose speeches sent thousands to their graves simply

illustrated the urgency of the need to 'destroy the existing so-called "Labour movement" and on its ruins rear a genuine Socialist movement'.⁶⁴ The October 1925 Commune contained the first in a long line of articles criticising the 'renegade' John S. Clarke, an ex-member of the SLP who had abandoned anti-parliamentarism to stand as a Parliamentary candidate for Labour. In the May 1927 Commune Clarke was criticised for having been among the minority of Labour councillors in Glasgow opposed to boycotting a forthcoming royal visit to the city.

Other targets included miners' union leader A. J. Cook, who shortly after criticising socialists who wrote for the capitalist press had contributed 'a pure and simple capitalist essay' to John Bull,⁶⁵ and Ramsay MacDonald, who had dined with the Governor of Boston responsible for decreeing the judicial murder of the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti.⁶⁶ After Arthur Henderson had been billed to speak at a public meeting in Shettleston in January 1929, the APCF published a special 'Henderson Visit Outrage' issue of the Commune Anti-Parliamentary Communist Gazette, calling for Henderson's expulsion from the labour movement on account of his complicity in the anti-working class actions of the wartime government (see Chapter 3)⁶⁷ There were seventeen arrests for 'disorderly conduct' when Henderson's revolutionary opponents disrupted the Shettleston meeting, but this did not deter the APCF from publishing a second edition of the Gazette when Henderson went on to speak at Clyde-bank. In addition to repeating the charges against Henderson, this issue also called for John Wheatley and David Kirkwood to be ostracised on account of their willingness to associate with Henderson.

In terms of method and content these attacks were typical of the way the APCF criticised trade union leaders and labour parliamentarians. Aldred described this method as 'not just so much deductive reasoning from theory as inductive reasoning from experience'.⁶⁸ By sheer weight of empirical evidence the APCF sought to prove beyond doubt the truth of two key anti-parliamentary assertions: that the rise 'from the gutter' to 'place in class society' was invariably accompanied by a rightwards shift in political outlook, and that no matter what their initial intentions might be, those who participated in the parliamentary circus always ended up administering the capitalist system against working-class interests.

The APCF's view that 'there exists as much Socialism in the constitution and the activity of the Parliamentary Labour Party as there is divinity in the priesthood'⁶⁹ also led it to attack the CPGB, since the Communist Party was still seeking to affiliate to the Labour Party, and (until 1929) was still peddling the United Front tactic. As it had done previously, the APCF refused to have anything to do with affiliation, on these grounds: 'If the Labour Party WERE a Socialist Party, every Communist should be inside. It is precisely because it is an Anti-Socialist party that no communist should associate with it.'⁷⁰ The APCF also continued to oppose the United Front — a tactic which it considered could only profit the careerist aspirations of Labour politicians and assist to power such anti-working class administrations as the 1924 Labour government.

From August 1924, with the formation of the National Minority Movement, the CPGB's efforts to put the United Front tactic into practice focused mainly on attempting to build rank and file movements within the trade unions and on forging alliances with left wing

union leaders. The APCF rejected the Minority Movement's arguments that a United Front within the unions could be an effective way of resisting attacks on working-class living standards, since the tactic offered no prospect of a permanent solution to the working class's problems. 'Coming together for the social revolution' remained 'the only logical and the only effectual resistance to capitalist aggression.'⁷¹ When the National Minority Movement drew up a list of demands which included calls for a 44 hour working week and a £4 per week minimum wage, the Commune responded by publishing an article written by the anarchist Albert Parsons at the time of the Eight Hour Day agitation in America in the 1880s. Parsons opposed this demand on the grounds that the capitalists had no 'right' to any amount of the working class's labour, and because workers could never dictate their conditions of labour so long as the capitalists controlled the means of production. Commenting on this the Commune stated:

'The position adopted by Parsons in 1885 is that adopted by the Anti-Parliamentary Communist movement in 1926. It defines our opposition to . . . the Minority Movement.'⁷²

This section can be concluded with a brief look at the APCF's attitude towards the labour movement's industrial wing. In May 1926 the APCF published a General Strike issue of the Commune Special Anti-Parliamentary Communist Gazette. Against the CPGB's slogan of 'All Power To The General Council' (of the TUC), the APCF called for 'NO Power to the General Council' and 'ALL POWER to Labour through its Strike Committees and Mass Meetings'.⁷³ It was a sign of the anti-parliamentary communist movement's decline, however, that the APCF did not manage to publish its

General Strike Gazette until four days after the strike had been called off by the TUC. In its post-mortem on the strike in the July Commune, the APCF repeated its demand for industrial action to be conducted on the following basis: 'All Power to THE WORKERS THEMSELVES, through their mass meetings, their DIRECTLY controlled strike committees, and the federation of their districts for power and action.' Mass struggle of this sort would abolish 'centralised negotiation' and thus defeat the power of the 'self-seeking treacherous bureaucrats, who crawl and squirm like worms in the hour of crisis'.⁷⁴ The 'eternally infamous' conduct of trade union leaders — right wing and left wing — during the General Strike 'debacle' strengthened the APCF's view that trade unions had become 'part of the machinery of the Capitalist State for facilitating the exploitation of the Working Class and keeping it in subjection'.⁷⁵

CONCLUSION

As far as the history of anti-parliamentary communism in Britain is concerned, the differences between the years before and after 1924 can be summed up as follows. The earlier period was characterised by intellectual ferment and high hopes of revolution, the later period by intellectual stability and dwindling expectations of revolution.

Between 1917 and 1924 the Dreadnought group evolved from a federation of suffragist reformists into a party of revolutionary antiparliamentary communists; from working within the Labour Party and trade unions to standing outside and against them; and from enthusiastic supporters of the new Bolshevik state to pioneering critics of its state capitalist nature. These rapid changes

in political outlook all took place in the context of the firm belief that the world revolution lay just around the corner.

By contrast, the years after 1924 saw the anti-parliamentarians consolidating the intellectual advances won previously. The anti-parliamentarians' views on the Labour Party and the trade unions were tested by the 1924 Labour government and the 1926 General Strike, and found to be correct. What was remarkable about the APCF's maintenance of anti-parliamentary communist positions after the disappearance of the Dreadnought group was that they upheld these views during a period when the prospects of revolution had suffered a series of seemingly decisive defeats.

Towards the end of 1923 one of the Commune's correspondents wrote:

The recent history of the working class since 1918 has been a record of steady misfortune from the time of the miners' lock-out [1921] . . . Very many comrades have lost heart in the losing fight and have fallen out of the struggle. The high hopes of 1918 have vanished and now the lament is 'Not in our day; we will not see the Revolution; perhaps in 50 years' time.⁷⁶

As members of the working class themselves, no doubt the revolutionaries who belonged to the APCF could not help feeling downhearted by the defeats of their class. To their credit, however, they did not become disillusioned and drop out of the struggle. To the best of their abilities they carried out the essential tasks of keeping the idea of communism alive, and nurturing the basic principles borne from previous periods of struggle.

Thus the anti-parliamentary communist movement's numerical decline during the 1920s did not result in any weakening in terms of theoretical clarity. Since the forerunners of the APCF had been organised on the basis

of a revolutionary political programme long before the post-war revolutionary wave, their existence as a revolutionary group did not tail-end the ups and downs of the class struggle to anything like the same extent that the Dreadnought group's existence did. Therefore they were far less likely to disappear when the level of class struggle declined. The communists who remained loyal to anti-parliamentarism during these bleak years had to be the hard core of the movement simply in order to keep going, and so were the best suited to carrying out the tasks appropriate to the period.

The stagnation in the class struggle also had the effect of giving the APCF's existence some stability. Undisturbed by having to come to grips with any new developments, it could peacefully propagate the lessons of the earlier period. But this period of calm would not last for long. By 1933 the anti-parliamentary communists had become divided amongst themselves. Typically, this was a rupture provoked by differing responses to new events which cast doubts on the relevance of established ideas. It is to an account of this split and its aftermath that we now turn.

NOTES

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